

A Stranger Monster- Part 2: The PennyRiddle by Kitkat39612

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Summary: After the events of A Stranger Monster: Part 1', Eleven and Mike have been separated. He wakes up in Hawkins, she wakes up in Derry. The Losers give her a home. When Mike finds out through a newspaper, the Party heads to Maine on foot to see her. However, something is hiding there-a monster that once lurked in Hogwarts. And there is only a month left until all hell breaks loose...

1. Chapter One: Newspapers

Warning: before you read this, barely any of it will make sense unless you read the first part, titled 'A Stranger Monster in Hogwarts.' This is the sequel, and features loose ends and cliffhangers left off in part one. This turned out to be much longer than I was expecting and is way over twice the size of part one. Additionally, this fanfic will be a high T rating because it contains darker themes to the first one, and a little more swearing. Plus I aim to write Pennywise as scarily as I can. If you type a review, no swearing or hate or I will remove it immediately. Hope you enjoy!

1

November 30th, 1985

Mike listened to Mr Clarke's explanation of how lightning struck a tree.

'Negative and positive charges build up in the ground around the tree, the tree itself, and the cloud...'

Sometimes Mike wondered if Mr Clarke would have as much faith in the science books as he did if Mike revealed the existence of magic.

'Hey, sir, you're never gonna believe this- Eleanor was actually called *Eleven*, right, and she had telekinesis. Cool, huh? See, me and Lucas got into a fight and she was *so scared* she zapped us to Scotland in 1993. And here's the *hilarious* part- *magic exists! I know, right?!'*

Sometimes Mike still got nightmares of the short period of time he'd spent in Hogwarts. Mainly the body he found; that poor first year, torn open with only one remaining eye.

A shiver gripped Mike, and his knuckles turned white on his pen. Will looked at him out of the corner of his eye, and started to draw.

Mike couldn't see what; Will kept his hand covering it. After about two minutes of scribbling, Will passed it over. It was a caricature of

Billy; his mullet and backside were of epic proportions, probably based off the senior girls descriptions of him.

Mike let out a loud snort, passed it off as a sneeze, and nodded at Will in thanks. Deciding that Max would probably appreciate it as well (considering she'd almost ensured he would never have children a few months ago), Mike passed it along to her.

Their relationship had certainly improved over the last few months. Yes, he'd kinda hated her at the start. But when her psychotic brother Billy had almost killed Steve, she'd stunned him with a small trophy on the shelf and grabbed a nailed bat Steve kept with him at all times.

The memory of Max smacking the nailed bat down on the floor between his legs regularly brought a smile to his face. Max had then lived up to her self-given title of 'Zoomer' and driven Steve to the hospital, face pulped after the brutal beating. Billy had somehow found out Steve had offered his house as a safe place for Max to meet up with the boys.

There hadn't been any supernatural happenings in Hawkins. Not since Eleven had disappeared.

Mostly, nightmares about Eleven stayed the same.

She'd return. It would feel so, unbearably real, and they'd just talk and hold hands. Simple stuff like that.

Then she'd suddenly disappear, and Mike would start crying in the dream and wake up crying in real life. Or at the very least, his pillow would be damp.

That dream had haunted him every other night, then once a week, then a couple of times a month.

Now, two years on, that dream was almost gone. He only had it once in a while for seemingly no reason.

Like last night.

Mike stifled a yawn, not wanting to offend Mr Clarke. The clock

edged round to noon.

`And that concludes our final lesson of 1985!' Mr Clarke said cheerfully, wiping off the board. Students started to pack things away at lightning speed. `I'm sorry we couldn't do anything fun, but I've been doing so many practical experiments with you I forgot about the academia. Now, I'll be hosting a science class over the Christmas holidays and sign up sheets-' Mr Clarke turned round from the blackboard and realized he was only talking to the four boys and Max. `Will be in the library.'

He sighed heavily. `Never become teachers, kids. So, what can I do for you?'

Mike went a little pink. `Um, remember you said in October you were collecting up newspaper clippings about supernatural occurrences?'

`Yes?'

`Could I please take a look at them over the holidays?'

There was some uncomfortable shifting from behind Mike. He blushed even harder with embarrassment. Mr Clarke looked curiously at him, but then clapped him on the shoulder.

`Sure thing, I'll drop them round. Now, off you go! Be free!'

Mr Clarke saluted them out of the classroom. Max ran ahead.

`Come on, slowpokes! Bet you can't keep up with the zoomer!'

`Oh, you're on!' Lucas ran after her. Mike and Will both looked at Dustin, who was seemingly fascinated by his sneakers. It was hard not to feel bad for him.

`Cheer up, Dustin,' Will said. `It's Christmas! There'll be girls everywhere. Plenty of other fish in the sea.'

`Yeah. Yeah, you're right.' Dustin started smiling. `So, marathon D&D session?'

`Sure. When should we do it? And,' Mike started hinting

heavily, 'who'll be the Dungeon Master? I suppose it would have to be someone who's done it a lot in the past and is good at sound effects.'

'Hmm, who do we know who could do *that*?' Asked Dustin, rolling his eyes skyward. 'Oh, I know! Mike, would *you* like to be the Dungeon Master?'

'I'd be honoured.'

'Woah, what about me? I never get to be Dungeon Master.'

The bickering continued all the way out of the door, and the boys collected their bikes. Max and Lucas waited a little further up the road.

They cycled/skated along the road, peeling off when they reached their houses.

Soon, it was only Mike and Max. Just because they'd repaired their relationship a little, didn't mean it wasn't extremely awkward.

'So, uh. How's your brother?'

'Terrified of me.'

'Hah. Good.' Mike's house came into sight on the horizon, and he let out a breath of relief. 'Well, see you.'

He pedalled furiously towards it, jumped off his bike halfway down the drive and stowed it in the open garage.

'Mom, I'm back!' He shouted, walking into the house. 'What's for lunch? Mom?'

His dad came through the door, toting Holly. 'Your mom went out for some supplies, Michael. She'll be back soon.'

His face seemed stiff. And were his eyes... red? Mike felt something tighten in his chest.

'Dad, is Mom okay?'

Ted let out a mirthless splutter. 'Oh, she's fine, she's absolutely dandy.'

'Then why-?'

'She *left!* Nearly eighteen years of marriage and she goes off with a, with a *teenager!*' Ted's voice exploded into the kitchen and his hands tightened on Holly.

'*What?* Mom's divorcing you? Where's she gone?'

'I don't know, I don't know!'

Holly began to cry and squirmed to be let down. Ted put her on the floor and she toddled away.

The room seemed to be sucked of air. Mike ran out to the garage, grabbed his bike and pedalled away.

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'Damn,' Lucas said quietly.

'I should've seen it coming,' Mike mumbled, chin balanced in his hands. 'It was totally Billy, wasn't it?'

'Probably. Max told me he'd been sneaking out more than usual. I bet she'll come round in a minute to say he's gone too.'

'I'm really sorry, Mike.' Will patted his knee. 'You can always come round my place.'

'Yeah, he'll starve to death if Ted's gotta do all the cooking,' Dustin chipped in in an attempt to make Mike smile. 'Ah, there it is!' Mike smiled wider.

The doorbell went and Lucas's mom opened it. Footsteps clattered up.

'Lucas, you'll never guess what-'

'We know,' the four boys answered in unison.

'*Bastard,*' Max said, kicking the door shut and flopping onto the floor.

`Dad's going nuts. He's saying he'll kill Billy if he ever comes back.'

`Well, that'll make life easier for you,' Will said, trying to help a little. Max chewed her lip.

`I dunno. If Billy doesn't get his ass back soon, I'm scared Dad'll take it out on Mom and me.'

Lucas sat bolt upright. `He does that?'

Max shrugged. `The worst he's done is smash a plate but he was trying to miss. I'm more scared for Mom, to be honest.'

Then she dipped her head so no one could see her face behind her auburn hair.

`Has anyone noticed our families seem to be falling apart?' Mike asked into the room.

`What do you mean?' Asked Will.

`I mean, Mom just left with *Billy*, Max's dad seems to be getting worse, Lucas' parents split up last year, and Will's going stir-crazy- Dustin's family is the only one intact and *that's* because it's just his mom and the cat.'

`Low blow, dude,' Dustin replied, `but true. It's weird every one of our families seem to be disintegrating in some way.'

`Are you saying it's like a *signal*?' Asked Max, surfacing from behind her hair.

`I dunno. Could be. *Anything* can happen in Hawkins.' Mike looked carefully at Max to see how she'd react. Lucas had told her everything about the demogorgon, Eleven, and Hawkins Lab (which he, Dustin and Will saw as cardinal sin) but it was obvious that a small part of her didn't believe a word.

After that, they just sat in silence, watched Ghost Busters, and ate cheese and crackers off a plate Mrs Sinclair brought up.

Mike looked at his house, sighed, and reluctantly wheeled his bike in. Ted waited at the door, arms folded.

'Where have you been, young man?'

'Lucas.' Mike tried to get by, wanting only to flop onto his bed. Expecting his father to stop him or yell for being out for so long, Mike was a little surprised when Ted simply let him pass.

'Oh, your science teacher called by. Left a box of newspaper clippings.' The man gestured limply behind him.

Mike nodded, smiled politely and collected the box from the hallway. A fact he tried not to notice was how dull his dad's voice sounded. Dull, dry and empty.

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Mike sat cross-legged in his room. The cardboard box stuffed with clippings had come with a card concealed in it; *For your christmas*, it read, in Mr Clarke's teacher handwriting, with a cartoon of a reindeer in the corner. Mike smiled, and placed it carefully on his windowsill.

Then sifted through the piles of supernatural happenings, ninety percent of which would probably be hoaxes. The clock hands moved closer to midnight, and his dad didn't come up to say goodnight.

Mike saw a news article that Mr Clarke must have put in there by accident; it was about potholes. *Pothole Problem in Derry: and WHO is willing to fix it?* The picture was about as faked as you could get; a row of residents stood in front of three middling potholes, with ridiculous expressions of deep woe on their faces. One even pouted out their bottom lip.

Mike went to toss it in the trash when his heart jumped out of his chest.

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'Lucas! Pick up your walkie talkie *right now*, you're gonna want to hear this!'

Lucas rubbed his eyes, crawled out of bed, tripped over twice and grabbed his walkie talkie off the window sill.

`What?' He hissed, sat against the wall. `This had better be important.'

Lucas wasn't dissapointed. His eyes almost popped out of his head.

`Have you told the others?'

`None of them are picking up.'

`Are you *sure* it's her?'

Two streets away, Mike looked at the paper again. Eleven was just about visible in the background, walking out of a supermarket with a box of Eggos clutched to her chest.

`Positive.'

2. Chapter Two: Sewers

2

LetmegoletmegoletmegoLET ME GO!

Tom Riddle raged at the enormous turtle above him. That turtle had *taken* him from the mind of the Weasley girl, nothing could do that...

`And yet, I did,' the turtle said pleasantly.

LET ME GO! Tom screamed once again.

`Oh, I'll have to. Can't keep people here indefinitely. You'll be able to leave in thirty seconds. I've exceeded the limit already.'

The inky blackness all around them suddenly went quiet as Tom stopped screaming.

I- can go? Because you have to let me?

`That's the gist of it. But I'm not returning you to Hogwarts, no. You've done enough damage there. Well, I won't return you *yet*. They need a break from you. Hmm, five seconds.'

WAIT! I need to go to-

And Tom dropped into a new world.

It was broad daylight; he immediately shot down into a drain to try and hide. He would blend in perfectly; this black ink form would enable him to look like some gunk from the bottom of someone's drain.

He wriggled further down into the sewers. How could he get back to Hogwarts? *Damn* that turtle.

Further and further down. Tom found a sense of forboding start to shiver over him. Something... wasn't... right. Not right at all.

Oh ho ho, what's come triptrapping over my bridge? Billy Goats Gruff,

come to feed me?

Tom saw something ahead of him, blocking up the pipe. He moved over it, but a clawed hand swiped out.

Tom jerked backwards instinctively, despite there being no need. The claws swept through the black liquid without doing him any damage. Covered with black gunk, the claw dropped still and morphed into a white glove.

Clip clopping goats come to feed me, liver and heart and lungs all warm in my tummy.

What are you? Tom asked, getting closer to the glove.

Why, I'm Pennywise, Pennywise the DAAAAANCING clown!

I'm Tom Riddle, and I want revenge.

Ain't this just the best coincidence? Cuz there's seven kids right up above me who's about to get what's coming for them. See, the problem is, I'm in hibernation. I needs to wake up.

And I need to get to Hogwarts.

Well, this is simple, isn't it?

A mouth protruded out of the thick, black goo encasing this thing. Tom knew what to do.

Pennywise the Dancing Clown choked and giggled and gagged as Tom Riddle wriggled down his throat.

3. Chapter Three: Eleven

3

August 31st, 1985

`What's Pennywise?'

Eleven stared up at the girl. She was extremely pretty. And extremely scary. The girl's eyes narrowed.

`Can't see any red balloons. And you aren't trying to kill me. Okay, we're good.'

Eleven flinched when the girl stuck out a hand. `I'm helping you up.'

`Oh!' Eleven took her hand and got up off the ground.

`So. What's your name?'

`Elliot.' Eleven decided it would be best to stick with her alias for a while.

`Really? You don't look it but I *know* you're a girl.' Eleven felt heat brush her cheeks, and admitted the truth.

`Not really. Bad men.' Sometimes Eleven found her lack of vocabulary infuriating. `Bad men- trying to hurt me.' There, maybe that would be more understandable. A sympathetic frown took over the girl's face.

`Bad men, huh? Yeah. I've had my fair share of those. You know what, my friend's house isn't far from here. Do you want to go there?'

`Yes.'

The girl led Eleven down the street, then turned round. `Forgot to say,' she said brightly. `I'm Beverly Marsh. And my friend's called Richie Tozier. If he does one of his voices, just say `Beep-beep'. Trust me. Works like a charm.'

`Beep-beep,' Eleven repeated obediently as she took a look at her surroundings. The street had a supermarket, a pharmacy, a few storm drains. It was pretty normal. The only weird thing was the amount of ragged Missing posters all over the walls and lampposts.

There was one of a gap-toothed boy who looked about six. Eleven walked up to it, and touched the boy's face through the poster. It remained still, and Eleven caught up with Beverly.

It didn't take long to reach Richie Tozier's house. The door swung open when Beverly knocked.

`Why, hello, my fair duchess!' He cried, bowing deeply. `And what can I help you with-'

`Mike!' Eleven cried, happiness rushing up her chest.

`What?'

`Where's Dustin?'

`I think you've got your wires-'

`Lucas safe?'

`Beverly, what the *hell* is going on?' Richie asked, gesturing to Eleven, who was beginning to look more closely at him. There were differences between this Mike and *her* Mike; the glasses, for one.

`I found her in the street. Dunno who she thinks you are, you sure as hell don't look like Mike Hanlon. He's too good-looking.'

`Shut up!'

Eleven was getting more and more confused, and realised, to her chagrin, she had started to cry. Richie and Beverly stopped bickering.

`Hey, uh, it's okay,' Richie said, giving Eleven a nervous pat on the shoulder. `We'll find your Mike. What does he look like?'

Beverly rolled her eyes. `Like you, stupid.' Richie ignored her.

`Come inside, Mom and Dad aren't gonna be back for a while.'

After giving a loud sniff and wiping her eyes on her tie, Eleven walked into the house.

She was going to get back to Hawkins, no matter what it took.

4. Chapter Four: Runaways

4

Trigger warning: Physical abuse, neglect and alcoholism. Don't read this chapter if sensitive to this.

December 1st, 1985

Max ducked her head down behind the couch.

Pieces of the mug rained down on her head.

`You can *go to hell!*' Slurred Neil Hargrove, whisky sloshing from the lip of the bottle. Max's mom watched through a crack in the bathroom door, mascara streaking her cheeks. `You can just *go to hell*, Maxine!'

He took another pot shot at her; not with a mug this time. Instead Neil hurled a vase. Max protected her head with her arms and the vase exploded three feet to her left, leaving a large water stain on the wall.

`Neil, stop,' Susan whispered ineffectually.

`*She knew, didn't she!* Knew her brother was seeing some *whore* of a thirty year old!'

To her shame, Max's voice wobbled with tears. `I didn't know. I didn't, I swear-'

`*Liar!*'

This time Neil didn't miss and the neck of the whisky bottle smacked Max hard across the forehead. Foul-smelling whisky splashed over her face. Max took refuge behind the sofa again and wiped the amber liquid off with a sleeve as Neil carried on screaming the word. `*Liar! Liar! LIAR!*'

`I am not a *LIAR!*' Max screamed back, a wave of anger suddenly pounding through her. She realised she had jumped to her feet, and

that there was quite a lot of blood coming out of her forehead. 'I. Am not. A liar,' she repeated, quieter but her voice thick with hatred.

Neil looked wrongfooted for a second.

Then went for the firearm on the mantelpiece.

He was almost certainly too drunk to aim properly, but that wasn't a risk Max was about to take. For a second, she stood frozen like a rabbit in the headlights.

'Run!' Max's mother yelled, and Max listened; she dived for the living room door, wrenched it open and fumbled with the lock on the front door.

A gunshot cracked out, and splinters of wood exploded next to her ear.

Max managed to wrench the door open, and sprinted out into the dark. Another gunshot, punching into the gravel, and another.

'Ran out of ammunition,' Neil muttered sorrowfully, and instead hurled the entire gun at her.

Get out, Mom. Get out 'cause I can't save you anymore.

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Lucas' mom stumbled down the stairs in her nightie. The clock read one in the morning.

The doorbell rang again, accompanied by loud knocking.

'I'm coming, I'm coming-' She pulled open the door and saw a girl standing there, shivering pathetically in dark blue pyjamas.

'Maxine,' she said, surprised. Then Max burst into noisy, gulping tears. 'Honey, honey. What's the matter?'

'M-my stepdad went b-batshit crazy. He might kill my mom, he might kill her!' she bawled out. Mrs Sinclair snapped into Mothering Mode; she did it whenever Lucas had a nightmare or when Erica got

injured.

Max was gently led to the kitchen. Mrs Sinclair made soothing noises whilst spooning Ovaltine into a mug, then placed it tenderly in front of Max.

`When did this happen?'

`I ran all the way here. 'Bout five minutes ago.'

`Okay, I'll give the police a ring.' As Mrs Sinclair walked out into the hall to phone Hopper, she saw Erica loitering on the stairs. *You get yourself back in bed*, she mouthed. *And get your brother.*

Erica crossed her arms and raised her eyebrows until they disappeared into her hairline. Then Max gave another gulping sob from the kitchen.

Erica had Lucas dragged out of bed, got him alert, and down into the kitchen within thirty seconds.

`You needed the nerd, you got him,' she said, pretending not to notice how Max's face was blotchy with tears. But she did drop a Hershey's Kiss bar next to the mug of Ovaltine.

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`Man, your dad's messed up,' Mike said sympathetically. It was the next day, and Lucas had called code red. Everyone had been round to his in minutes.

`Step-dad,' Max snapped back. Then took a deep breath. `Sorry. Didn't mean to bite your head off.'

`So Hopper managed to get there before your step-dad could do anything to your mom?' Asked Will, after an awkward pause.

`Yeah. She's fine.' The `but' in the room was obvious. `But they've taken her to hospital for a mental assessment. Apparently she urgently needs treatment. Mom's been depressed for months.'

`So you're staying with Lucas' family?'

`Yeah.'

Mike didn't contribute to the conversation; his brain was filled with thoughts of his own dad. The TV had blared out so loudly last night it woke up Holly. She'd bawled as loudly as she could. Ted never checked on her; Mike did that around midnight. And three new alcohol bottles rested in the trash.

No, this christmas had not started well.

Mike shoved his hands into his hoodie just to find something to do with them. There was a small crinkle. The Derry newspaper article was still in there, dated two weeks earlier.

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Over the next week, Mike discovered something strange happening. The responsibilities in the house seemed to be slowly passing from his dad's shoulders to his- for instance, feeding Holly and his dad before himself, ignoring the growling in his stomach. And putting off the bills that had come through the letterbox, shoving them beneath the sofa. It carried on until Mike felt constant frustration simmering under the surface of his skin. He bottled it down.

For a while.

Mike found himself standing in front of his dad at midnight, holding a sleeping Holly.

`Dad. Get up, clean yourself up, and go to bed.'

`Nooooo.'

`Come on, you smell awful. When was the last time you showered?'

`Nuh-uh, you can't make me.'

Something hot zapped through Mike's body like an electric shock; he lashed out at the LaZboy, and the spring shot out. His dad tipped backwards, a half full vodka bottle dropping off his lap. It shattered onto the floor, joining the entourage of beer cans.

Mike flinched back, images of Max's bloody forehead flashing through his mind.

`Dad?' He half whispered, tensing his muscles. Nothing. `Dad?' Mike got a little closer, clutching Holly so tightly she whimpered in her sleep.

A loud snore erupted from Ted.
He'd fallen asleep.

Mike gave the LaZboy another kick, and stormed up to his room. Holly woke up from the bouncing motion and started to cry.

`Mommy?' She yelled. Mike got to his room, squeezed his eyes shut, then took a deep breath.

`You're okay,' he said, hoping his voice sounded calm. Holly quietened down after he rocked her. She was almost four; too big for this, but since Karen Wheeler's departure Holly seemed to have reverted to a baby.

Eventually she fell back to sleep. Mike sat down carefully on his bed, trying not to wake her again. His billboard hung on the wall, opposite his bed. On it was a crumpled photo of his mom, of Nancy (who'd gone to college) and any number of photos of him and his friends. A shot of them all in Ghostbusters outfits, taken by Jonathan Byers, was in pride of place in the centre.

And half concealed behind the Christmas photos was the Derry clipping.

In that second, Mike made his resolution.

He laid Holly out on his pillow to rest, dragged his school rucksack out from under the bed, threw out the books, and started shoving in socks and comic books.

No way in hell was he staying here any second longer than he had to.

Then he took a second look at the rucksack. Odd socks and X-Men comics bulged out of it. Reluctantly, Mike removed them, put in clean, matching socks, pulled two T-Shirts on himself, packed another

outfit, and stuffed in food from the downstairs kitchen. Then packed in clothes for Holly, an empty water bottle, and *one* comic book.

Come on, one wasn't gonna hurt.

He unpinned the newspaper and carefully stowed it in his jeans pocket. Derry. The word was loaded with hope.

Mike put Holly in her old baby carrier; it was a little tight, but she'd do just fine. And then came the most difficult part.

The door squeaked slightly as Mike crept along the landing to Nancy's old room. Holly sniffled, as if aware of what they were doing. Nancy's door was stiff; it creaked ominously as Mike pushed it open. As he climbed out of the window, song lyrics washed through his head...

Don't walk away... in si-lence.

The entire damned song had run through his mind by the time Mike was halfway down the road.

5. Chapter Five: Message

5

Hello. I've noticed I'm not getting many likes or follows etc. so if someone could please leave a review telling me how to improve my writing or narrative, that would be brilliant. Thank you, and shoutout to ihavesevereopjd.

31st August, 1985

`Why don't you talk much?'

Beverly had left Eleven and Richie alone together whilst she fetched the `others'. Eleven looked up from her nut bar and shrugged. She took another chomp; when would the constant hunger in her belly go away?

`Mr Clownzo's Nutbars!' Richie suddenly shrieked in a faux Mississippi accent. `Packed with protein, nutrition and that element of FUN!'

`Beep-beep, Richie.'

Eleven smiled down at the bar. She'd discovered her mischievous side since Mike had found her in the forest; it was a nice thing to have.

Both kids jumped when a door slammed.

`Okay, she's really nervous and looks like she's been dragged through greywater, so *be nice*.'

Beverly's voice floated through the hallway. Richie jumped up, and ran over to an obese boy.

`Haystack!' He called jovially, hi-fiving him. `And Eds, m'boy!'

`Don't call me that,' Eds said grumpily.

`Hello, Haystack and Eds,' Eleven said, trying to remember how to be polite.

`H-Hi,' said a lanky boy with a stutter. `I'm Bill. And those two a-a-aren't really called Haystack and Eds. That's Ben, that's Eh-eddie.' They both raised their hands in greeting.

The introductions carried on. Eleven shook hands with Stan, and Mike Hanlon clapped her shoulders.

When that was done with, the eight kids got themselves a drink, mainly Coke. It took Eleven five minutes to decide she hated it, after the bubbles went up her nose and gave her chronic hiccups that caused her to have a stutter worse than Bill's.

`So,' Beverly asked, setting down her glass. `What's your story, Elliot?' And then she gave Eleven a covert wink.

How could she tell them the story, considering how limited her speech was? Then Eleven had a brainwave.

`Pencil,' she asked, making scribbling movements in the air in case she had the wrong word. `And- and paper! Please.'

`Sure,' Richie said, and pulled some plain paper out of a drawer and a very blunt, yet usable, pencil.

And Eleven drew out the series of events. An image of a boy disappearing. A picture of the demogorgon hanging over them. A girl with wild, curly hair, a boy with freckles and a boy with glasses. Mike.

The seven kids watched intently.

`Done,' she said eventually, passing over the four sheets she'd scribbled on.

`YOW-za, you've been through the mill-'

`What the hell is that thing?'

But Bill had the strongest reaction. When the papers reached him, he glanced through them, nodding. Then on the third page, his eyes suddenly shot wide open.

`Elliot,' he stammered, stabbing at the page with a finger. `W-Where

d-d-did you see this? The tuh-tuh-turtle?'

`In the dark place.'

`Why did the Maturin visit you?'

`H-he said-' Where were her words? `Demogorgon gone, but other monster coming. Tom Riddle and...' Beverly had said it's name. `Pennywise.'

Eddie knocked over his water and started to wheeze. He groped in his pocket and took a breath from an odd little metal device.

`Shut up,' Stan said. `You're lying. Beverly, she's got to be lying.'

Eleven felt a little stab in her gut at the accusation, and the waves of hostility coming off almost every child at the table.

`Not lying,' she said slightly desperately. `Promise. Friends don't lie.'

`Well, guess what, we aren't your friends. Beverly just drags you in off the street, for all we know-'

No one at the table found out what Stan was about to say, because Beverly tipped his chair backwards. He yelped, grabbing onto the sides.

`Elliot is trying to warn us,' she hissed. `Don't screw it all up with denial.'

`Hey, didn't you know denial is a river in Egypt?' Joked Richie, fine beads of sweat on his forehead.

Eleven looked Stan dead in the eye. `Not lying. Pennywise, and Tom Riddle.'

That was what the turtle had told her when she slipped into the dark place, when she and Mike hid inside that classroom. It was probably his fault she'd ended up here, and not where she belonged.

`When's Pennywise coming back?' Beverly asked, righting Stan, who made a noise like an angry chicken.

`I don't know.'

From the other end of the table, Eddie's device clicked as he wheezed in another dose of medicine.

6. Chapter Six: Where?

6

8th December, 1985

`Dustin... psst! *Dustin!*'

Mike tapped on his window. Then stepped back as a patter of footsteps came from inside.

`Mike, what the-' Dustin saw Holly and the bulging rucksack. `Hey, everything okay?'

`I'm going to Derry. Eleven's there. I told you, remember?'

Mike pulled the clipping out of his pocket.

`Come on. You wouldn't go to Derry unless something else happened. You found out Eleven was there a *week* ago.'

Dustin rubbed his eyes and opened them a little wider. A sudden feeling of regret pounded down on Mike. `I left dad. He's-' Mike realised he'd never told his friend how bad it had got at home. `Dad's drinking. A lot. I've been taking care of everything.'

`Shit, Mike! You should've told me.'

`I can't stay there. And if I go to Child Services, me and Holly might get separated.'

`Okay. I understand.' Dustin shut his window and pulled down the blind. Mike blinked. Did Dustin just abandon him? No, he'd never do that. A chilly breeze whipped through the already freezing. The stars weren't as visible as they had been; too many houses in Hawkins using up too much electricity. Pollution was on the rise, the news kept saying.

Right then, that was the least of Mike's worries. He looked down. Addmittedly, his sister had always been kind of annoying- like the time she'd swallowed his best D&D dice and rendered it unusable.

And the time she'd switched off the TV whilst he was watching it, and caused him to miss the end of M*A*S*H. But the last week had turned her into the only family member he could rely on.

A second later, Dustin clambered out, fully dressed with a packed rucksack, and yawning widely.

`Kay, let's get this shitshow going,' he said, starting to walk down the drive. `I left Mom instructions on how to feed Yertle. She'll be fine.'

A strap slipped off his shoulder, and Dustin hitched it back on again, walking out into the road.

Mike smiled after him. Then caught up.

The next house was the Sinclair's. Dustin peered through the living room window; there, lying on the couch, was Max, sleeping soundly.

`Hey. Hey, Madmax,' Dustin whispered, tapping on the glass with his knuckles. Her eyes opened slowly.

`Aaah!' She screamed, jerking her covers up to her chin. Dustin waved at her. Max kicked away her blanket, stormed over to the window, threw it open and the two boys jerked back through reflex.

`What the *hell* is wrong with you?'

`Maxine? You okay?' Mrs Sinclair's voice came from the stairs. The curtains swished shut again.

`Fine, Mrs Sinclair. Just had a nightmare.'

The footsteps receded. Max yanked the curtains open and planted her hands on the window sill. She took a sharp breath.

`We're going to Derry,' Mike explained hastily. Max eyeballed them. `You'll be able to get away from your stepdad.'

Her hands relaxed a little on the frame as she considered them. Then they dropped completely. `Okay, you weirdos. I'll come. Give me a minute, I'll get Lucas.'

She shut the window again, and pulled the curtains closed.

Ten minutes later, the door opened. Lucas and Max walked out.

`Why didn't you think of this before?' Lucas asked, giving Mike a slight token punch. `Erica is driving me insane.'

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When they called on Will, however, there was no answer.

`He can't be asleep *that* deeply,' Max said.

`I think I know where he is.'

Mike's guess turned out to be right. Out in the woods was a haphazard fort constructed by the Byer brothers a couple of years ago; sat in front of it was Will. He had a large coat on over his pyjamas, and was chewing on a biscuit.

`Hey,' he said without turning round. `So, are we gonna do the whole `It isn't safe for you out here, come inside' deal or what? Maybe this time I'll get grounded.'

`Uh, Will?' Asked Lucas. Will turned round.

`Oh, it's you guys. Sorry. Thought you were my mom.' He looked closer. `Why are you all dressed like that? And why do you have Holly?' It dawned on him. `Wow. You're actually running away.'

`Wanna come?' Lucas adjusted his bandana with an index finger, twirling it round his throat. Will's mouth slowly moved into his smile.

`Yeah.' He reached into Castle Byers, and pulled out a rucksack. `I've been packed and ready to run away for weeks. Just haven't worked up enough nerve. Let me get changed.'

And he disappeared into the fort. When he emerged, Will flicked on the torch. It illuminated his features garishly, and he grinned.

`So. Where are we going?'

7. Chapter Seven: Teeth

7

20th December, 1985

Derry, Maine, repeated Tom.

Yep, sunshine, one and only and ruled by me.

Ruled by us.

Being inside Pennywise's head wasn't a pleasant experience. Even Tom shuddered at the gruesomeness of Pennywise's victims. A few were even worse than the first year killed by the monster in Hogwarts.

Better get used to it, Tommy boy, trilled Pennywise. He deliberately thought of an image of a young girl shredded like pork. *Cause I'm even madder than you.*

Their combined form crawled through the sewers. Tom merging with Pennywise had ended his twenty-seven year hibernation. He had yet to see what they would look like. Seeing as they had fused, it most certainly wouldn't be pretty.

Tom took control of the left arm and touched their face; the pristine white glove came away with strings of black goo clinging to it, and he thought he felt a few jagged teeth.

You need a Healer.

Offended by my teeth, huh?

Tom shrieked with pain. The left arm was chomped away by the serrated teeth Pennywise had suddenly sprouted from the side of his mouth. The sharp pain ended as soon as it began, and Tom realised the arm had regrown.

Tom, in turn, wriggled out of Pennywise's mouth and latched himself over Pennywise's nose and mouth.

I can suffocate you. Tom tightened his hold a little as the clown struggled. *I could do it so easily.*

He slid back down Pennywise's throat. They'd reminded each other of how deadly they were against each other, as well as combined.

Tom felt Pennywise grin.

8. Chapter Eight: Ferrari

8

9th December, 1985

The five teenagers walked through the night. Holly woke up around six, when Mike was so tired he could barely hold his eyes open.

`Mike? Where are we?'

`Uh... somewhere near Elwood Junior School. We aren't staying with dad anymore.'

`Yippee!' Holly bounced up and down, clapping. `Put down.'

More than happy to relieve himself of her weight, Mike unclipped the harness and deposited Holly on the ground. She pointed at an iHop down the road. `Breakfast!'

`Shit!' Cursed Lucas suddenly. Everyone looked at him, including Holly, who muttered the word experimentally under her breath. `Sorry- I just realised, we don't have any money.'

`Shit!' Repeated Dustin, clapping his hand to his forehead and accidentally knocked his cap off. `Too bad, Holly.'

Her face crumpled, and she thumped down on her haunches. Instead, they made a breakfast out of apples and shared a biscuit Dustin brought. That satisfied their hunger, but the fact remained Holly was the only one barely functioning. And they'd all need to be on the same sleep schedule.

That meant either Holly slept through the day... or everyone else kept walking.

Mike glanced over to Holly. She was skipping cheerfully on the spot with biscuit crumbs smeared around her mouth.

Mike took a swig of Coke for luck and pulled his rucksack on again.

By the time they reached a town called Lima, Lucas had his eyes shut and was being led forward by Max, Will and Dustin were almost carrying each other, Mike was yawning every other second and even Holly's spirit had waned through the long hours of walking.

The alarm would have gone up by then. Hopper would be searching for them, and Joyce would be going *beyond* frantic. But by now, they'd be far away enough to make it difficult to trace them.

Mike looked about, just about keeping his eyes open.

`Okay,' he said wearily. `We can sleep in that clump of bushes and trees there.'

Groans and sighs of relief exploded from the group. Mike took off his coat and collapsed down onto it, feeling like he was floating the minute he shut his eyes.

`No, wait,' Dustin mumbled. `Gotta- gotta keep warm. Everyone, put your coats on the ground, and sleep close. Conserve body heat.'

If he'd been even vaguely alert, Mike would have felt extremely embarrassed at sleeping in close proximity to a girl. However, he registered nothing apart from how *completely* exhausted he was.

`Bedtime story,' Holly insisted, even though she must have been as tired as everyone else.

`Go to sleep,' groaned Mike, covering his eyes with the sleeve of his hoodie.

`Where?'

`Hey, Holly, you can sleep here, if you want,' called Dustin. `Just poke me if I trumpet in the night.'

Holly started giggling. She settled after two minutes or so.

Mike slid into a dream; he was in the final episode of M*A*S*H, but instead of it being Hawkeye Pierce it was Lucas. And Mews the cat

was there. And there was a turtle, floating in the air, seeming almost disapproving...

0

Mike woke up with a jolt, the dream already slipping away from him.

He guessed it was three in the morning. Nine hours of sleep.

`Guys, get up. Hey!' He clapped sharply. Max blocked her ears.

`Go away,' she groaned, curling into a ball.

`We need to put as much distance between us and Hawkins, and that means we go *now*.' Mike realised that he sounded exactly like Hermione. `Move it!'

The bottle of coke was drained after everyone had had a drink from it to get awake. Will shook his head to try and get himself alert.

Holly was dead to the world. Mike's back ached from lugging her around so much.

`Can someone else have a turn?'

`Dude, she's your sister,' Max replied, rubbing her eyes with the heel of her hands.

`Thanks.'

Mike couldn't stick her legs into the harness. Holly seemed to have turned into a jellyfish overnight out of sheer cussedness.

`You wanna be difficult? Fine,' Mike whispered to her under his breath. He knew full well it was irrational but God help the person to point that out to him. That was how he ended up carrying Holly for four hours until she woke up.

`Mike?'

`Yeah?'

`I'm cold.'

Mike took his rucksack off his back, and then pulled out her puffy winter coat. The sleeves were a little short. Holly obediently put her arms out, let Mike get the coat on, insisted on buttoning it up herself and then strode on ahead in her pink shoes.

`Your sister's actually kind of cute, isn't she?' Will said as Holly sang a nursery rhyme.

`She is if you don't have to live with her constantly.'

By then the sun had just about risen, and it was around seven. Cars had started to zoom down the motorway. A boy without a shirt hung out of the roof of a scarlet Ferrari.

`*Woo hoo!*' He yelled, his mullet blowing back as he punched the air.

`How fast is he going?' Asked Dustin incredulously.

`Now *that's* a zoomer,' Max nodded, looking at the car enviously. Holly had moved onto Ring Around the Roses. Grey smoke rose from the back tires of the Ferrari, and a small seed of anxiety started growing in Mike's chest.

`Hey, Holly,' he called, trying to keep a smile on his face. `Why don't you get back here, away from the road?' The boy hanging from the sunroof got back into the car as it started to make weird noises and swerving.

`Why?' She asked, turning around to look at him. The sun caught her blonde hair.

And then the car suddenly jerked to the side, mounting the curb.

`*HOLLY!*'

There was a thump; the red Ferrari screeched to a halt.

A pair of pink toddler's shoes stuck out from underneath it.

9. Chapter Nine: Turtle

9

Holly found herself floating.

An enormous, wrinkled face stared down at her. She smiled at it, and patted its beak.

‘Funny tortoise,’ she said, her small hand the size of one of its scales.

‘Close enough,’ the turtle sighed in a voice of long-suffering. ‘Yes, you’ll be more useful than your brother.’

Holly stared at the turtle in confusion, her brown eyes wide and innocent.

‘Holly Wheeler, you will have to be very, very brave,’ the turtle said gently, its flippers moving up and down.

‘I can be brave.’ Johnny Hubbard had put a spider on her in recess, and she hadn’t screamed. ‘What’s your name?’

‘The Maturin. I’m sorry I had to kill you. There wasn’t any other way I could get into your head. You have a very odd mind, Holly Wheeler.’

‘I’m dead?’ Holly didn’t feel fear; more a deep unease. She certainly didn’t *feel* dead.

‘Not to worry, you’ll be right as rain in a minute. But there are things you must remember. Are you listening?’

Holly sat down in the blackness, with her legs crossed and back straight. Mrs Agnorak made them sit like that in kindergarten.

‘I’m listening.’

The turtle brought forward one flipper. ‘December 24th, look for these people.’

A girl with curly hair walked on the spot on the flipper. The number 11 floated above her. Then two versions of Mike, one with glasses and one without. RICHIE. MIKE.

The next figure was what made Holly jerk back to life with a scream. The turtle tried to yank her back.

`Wait! I'm not finished!'

But she was gone.

0

Holly's eyes snapped open, moving around frantically. Mike's face leaned over her, panic and fear written all over it. What made Holly even more scared was the sight of the tears on his cheeks. Her heart pounded in her chest.

More of the world swam into vision; Max, Dustin, Lucas and Will were yelling at a girl with smooth brown hair and a boy with a mullet.

`Guys! Guys, she's awake!' Mike shouted over to them. Holly tried to remember what she'd dreamt of. The horrifying thing popped back into her head, and she started crying. `You're safe, okay?' Mike scooped Holly up carefully.

`I can't believe that didn't kill her,' Dustin said, shaking his head and wiping his forehead.

`Hey,' said the girl, frowning at them. Mike glared at her viciously. `I know you! You were on the telly! Yeah, missing persons report. We should go to the police. Jack, there was even reward money!'

Mullet Boy/Jack was looking extremely uncomfortable. `I dunno- I mean, we nearly killed their sister...' She didn't listen, and bobbed up and down on the balls of her feet, smiling happily.

`You all get in... we can fit you in somehow.'

`And what makes you think we're getting in there?' Lucas snapped. That possibility didn't seem to have occurred to the girl. She started to

look more menacing.

`I can force you.'

`Force us to go back to Hawkins and we'll tell the police that you almost killed a four year old,' Max said smoothly.

`Greta,' Jack muttered, tugging on her arm. `Get back into the car.'

Greta's lips lost their colour. `A thousand pounds,' she whispered, staring at them all. And then she whipped round, and threw open the driver's seat.

The ferrari zoomed away.

Holly suddenly remembered what she needed to say. `Eleven, Richie, Mike, PennyRiddle,' she said. `24th December.'

Mike looked down at her. `What did you say?'

`Eleven, Richie, Mike, PennyRiddle. 24th December. The funny tortoise said.'

`You mean turtle?' Mike knew that was how Holly referred to turtles. `Is anyone else noticing that turtles seem to be coming up a *lot*?'

`Yeah,' Dustin said suddenly. `Remember Ginny Weasley?'

Lucas, Max and Will looked a little confused, but Mike nodded. `That ginger girl. What about her?' The last they'd seen of her was her collapsed in the Chamber of Secrets after fighting off that weird, sticky stuff.

`She mentioned a turtle, too. `The turtle told me.' And then Eleven started acting a little weird after she said `turtle.'

Mike took it in, then shook his head ruefully. `Would it be too much to ask for a *normal* life?'

`Probably,' the four others answered in unison. `Prob'ly,' Holly copied a beat later.

Mike sighed heavily. `Let's just get to Derry.'

10. Chapter Ten: Hanlon

10

10th November, 1985.

Eleven walked through the Barrens, wriggling her shoulders in the new jacket she'd got. It was a hand-me-down from Beverly, like with everything else, but new to *her*. The kids didn't go to school, because it was still shut after the spate of murders Pennywise had created.

Deep in the forest was her home. A fort that all the boys (apart from Eddie, who plead asthma) had built for her as a surprise. Beverly had kept her busy at her grandmother's house, teaching her ABCs.

Eleven sang the song under her breath in rhythm to her feet. It was a source of endless pride that she could now read. Bill kept her supplied with basic books from his brother Georgie's room. Knowing about Georgie, Eleven was careful to keep them clean and safe. Considering where she lived, it was no easy task.

A lot had changed in the two and a bit months since Beverly had found her. For instance, Eleven had hair. She'd been surprised to find out her hair was as curly as Dustin's. When she thought about what it had looked like shaved, Eleven had expected it to come out like Mike's.

The downside to it being so springy was it was impossible to clip anything into it. They always fell out within minutes.

Eleven was on her way to Mike H's farm. When Mike H was sick with flu, he'd invited her to feed the animals and milk the cows.

`He's only doing it because he knows the rest of us'll say no,' Eddie told her. `Cows give you TB.'

For the first month, Eddie had given Eleven a wide berth- *She's not had any vaccines!*- But eventually warmed up to her. In fact, when she herself caught the flu after seeing Mike H, he'd been the one to bring round an entire thermos of soup.

`Mom usually makes it, but she'd freak if I said I was going near someone with flu. I tried to follow the recipe, I didn't want to give you salmonella or something like that.'

Then he'd scarpered after Eleven sneezed. She'd poured some into a bowl that Beverly brought round. True to his word, the chicken was cooked dry just in case, and the sauce was disgusting, but it was warm and the thought counted.

The walk to the Hanlon's was long, but definitely worth it. She'd volunteered permanently to feed and milk the cows. They were her favourite animals on the farm.

A few miles later, she had arrived.

`Hey, sweetheart!' Called Mike H's grandfather, dropping the pitchfork and waving at her. Eleven waved back.

`Hi, Mr Hanlon! Warm today, light wind heading southeast.' She'd gone to Bill's for breakfast and he'd had the weather report on.

`Yep. Quite mild. Cow's are in there, same as always.'

`Thanks!' Eleven walked to the barn as Mr Hanlon started shifting hay again. The cows looked up at her when she came in. She'd named them after characters in Georgie's books, and TV shows; Spot, Mr and Mrs Huxtable, and Bear. Obviously those names were private, only for her and the cows.

Mr Huxtable first. Eleven milked her, leaning her forehead against the cow's warm flank. It had taken her a while to get a grasp on gender, but by the time she'd figured out a cow couldn't be called *Mr* Huxtable it was too late.

An hour later, she came out, washed her hands at the pump, and went to call on Mike H. Him and Beverly were her favourites. Eddie was too skittish, Stan still didn't trust her, Bill and Ben were nice but a little stand-offish. And Eleven couldn't even look at Richie without feeling a small tug. Eventually she'd decided to stay in Derry; something was coming, every Loser knew that; Eleven could sense if she left, they'd all be doomed. Still, in her weaker moments she'd

been strongly tempted to run away back to Hawkins. One time she'd even got as far as packing her Hogwarts school shirt (which she'd turned into a bag) with some food only to take it all out after thirty seconds.

Eleven knocked on the door, then stepped back. Mike H had a bad habit of opening doors rather... forcefully. That was her first experience with a broken nose, and blood leaking out of it not caused by her powers. She touched the slight bend when the door banged open, and Mike H stood there, wiping his hands with a towel.

`Hi, El. I'm goin' out to the Ironworks for scrap. Wanna come? I'm trying to build a little sculpture of something.'

`Yes, please.'

They headed down the road. Mike H walked ahead with long strides, Eleven having to run a little at times to catch up. He was pretty good company. The Ironworks was a good seven or eight miles away. Eleven's stamina had picked up considerably since her arrival at Derry. She could easily run a mile or so without getting out of breath, and jog four. A recent growth spurt had left her three inches or so taller than she had been in August.

Eleven felt happy here.

It was a permanent sadness to know that that would change.

11. Chapter Eleven: iHop

11

15th December, 1985 'I imagined there'd be more moose,' Dustin said thoughtfully, peering about him with a hand shadowing his eyes. Max leaned forward to look at him, eyebrows raised. 'What? Just sayin'.'

Mike smiled; halfway to Maine. There'd been a few close calls with the police, the closest of which had been three police officers standing a foot away from where the band of kids hid in the bushes. Now, they stood in Toronto. *Canada*. And between them, over the course of a week, they had managed to scrape up five dollars in coins, and a five dollar was about to get her wish. How could they do it without alerting anyone they'd been there? Max was recognisable as the only girl, *everyone* would be on Red Alert for Holly. But Will, on the other hand, had a certain quietness about him.

'So, be as quick as possible,' Max said to Will, passing her coins over to him. 'And if things get hairy just abandon the pancakes.'

'No, don't do that!' Holly chipped in quickly. Her dream of eating at an iHop was so close; specifically, just down the road. It was around five thirty in the evening.

'I'll be fine,' Will answered, rolling his eyes and clutching the money tightly. 'Full stack,' he muttered under his breath as he walked away. Then caught sight of his reflection in a shop window. '*Man*, I look disgusting!' He touched the dirt on his face and ran a hand through his now-greasy bowl cut. Then Will walked into the busy iHop. No one looked up- good start.

'Welcome to iHop, what can I getcha,' said a young cashier, with short, bright pink hair. She was probably in her late teens.

'Full stack, please.' The girl held out her hand, and Will put the five dollar note and a dollar coin into it. She snapped her hand shut and dropped it into the till, pushed the change towards him, and then looked up. Will jumped.

`It'll be ready in a minute,' she said, staring straight at him.

`Th-thanks,' Will stammered, picking at his hangnail. He hid his face as discreetly as he could, and waited against the wall, looking at the TV. A news report popped up. *`Six Hawkins kids still missing,'* it read, and then photos of all of them. Will felt panic rising in his throat, and pulled up his hood. Then his mom's voice came out of the TV.

`All I want is for my son to come *home*,' she said. Will looked up, and immediately regretted it; Joyce's hair stood up, like she'd been combing her fingers through it constantly for the last week. There was a red tinge around her eyes. `Please, Will. If you're watching this, phone me or... or anything.' The news feed cut back to the newsreader going over last appearances.

Will was startled to find tears were trickling down his own cheeks. `Full stack pancakes to go,' the cashier said, handing them to him. Now she was chewing bubble gum. `Thanks,' Will said, quickly wiping his face under the pretence he was scratching an itch on his nose. `Have a nice day.' The cashier peered at him, then looked to the TV. Will braced himself.

She winked, then pushed him towards the door. The message couldn't have been clearer- get out before they see you. Will did.

`There was a news report about us,' Will panted when he reached his waiting friends. `Quickly, we need to go-'

`What?'

`You heard me, hurry up!' They pulled their rucksacks back on and did their usual panic routine; cut through back gardens and stick to dark alleyways. When Will removed the pancakes from the bag, they looked a little worse for wear. Holly sighed mournfully, and picked out the largest piece, before chewing on it calmly. The others followed in a similar fashion, counting the remaining chunks of ruined pancake, sharing them out and becoming rather sticky.

`I've got it in my *hair*,' exclaimed Max, lifting up several strands clumped together with syrup.

`Just suck it off,' advised Dustin cheerfully, licking his fingers. She shrugged, and did as he suggested. Mike looked at Will. He'd been

pretty quiet the entire meal.

`You okay?' He asked, gently elbowing Will.

`No,' Will mumbled. He blinked quickly. `I saw my mom on the news. I'm a horrible person,' he burst out, voice breaking. `She wants me to come back! Dad left her and Jonathan went off to college and you know what I did? *I left her as well!*' Will picked up a stone and hurled it into a tree. It bounced off the bark, harmless. So Will grabbed the nearest branch and started hitting the tree with that instead, tears spilling down his face. They stared, frozen at the sudden outburst of fury from a usually suppressed Will. Then he thumped down again and didn't look up for the rest of the evening.

12. Chapter Twelve: Discovery

12

17th December, 1985

Eleven was crouched in her fort, crying miserably.

She'd done it again.

First time she'd blasted herself, Mike, Dustin and Lucas into Hogwarts, this time she'd managed to bring down an entire *tree*.

What had happened? Eleven sniffed and blinked, trying to remember the details that led up to the old oak tree ripping out of the dirt.

A woman came up to Eddie- she was big and fat, her hair crimped up with curlers. And she'd grabbed his ear. She'd started to yank him along, screaming about medication and sickness.

And Eddie had started crying. The kind of crying born out of anger and embarrassment as they all watched.

Now Eleven could remember- the blurry mess of details sorted themselves out.

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`You've been sick, Eddie! You know it! Hanging around with these kids and- and *her!*' Mrs Kaspbrak jabbed a shaking, sausage-like finger towards Beverly. Beverly paled, and stepped back limply. Mrs Kaspbrak seemed to take this as a victory, and screeched even louder into his ear. `*And now you've left your pills!*' The woman jerked him along, letting go of Eddie's ear and instead dragging him by the wrist.

`Let go of him!' Roared Richie, charging forwards and trying to pull Eddie away from his mother. Suddenly Eddie, wheezing through tears, was caught in a tug-of-war.

Eleven felt like she was going to throw up as she watched it all. Eddie had brought her a thermos of soup when she was sick.

`Leave him *alone!*' Eleven screamed, automatically throwing her hand forward. Mrs Kaspbrak was suddenly eclipsed by the shadow of the oak tree as it tore out of the ground, roots springing out, frozen dirt flying. Her mouth oozed open, comically wide.

Richie grabbed Eddie's shoulders and hurled them both out of the way.

`*Mom!*' Screamed Eddie. His yell broke through to Mrs Kaspbrak, and she launched herself to the side, landing with a thud at the same time as the oak tree.

It's enormous girth slammed into the tarmac. Deep cracks spread out from the fallen tree, along with shards of black road and a now-decimated bird's nest. Silence.

Eleven's eyes widened with shock as she took in what she'd almost done.

`Y-You-' Stammered Mrs Kaspbrak, shaking like a leaf and pointing at Eleven. And then she rolled onto her front, heaved herself onto all fours, straightened up and ran away. The Loser's horrified eyes turned to Eleven. Eleven took a step back. And another. A drop of blood spread into her chapped lips.

And then Eleven sprinted in the opposite direction, charging into the foliage, sobbing the whole way and feeling her friend's eyes burning into her back.

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Now she was huddled in her fort, wrapped in a blanket and feeling unbearable remorse. She was sure she'd never feel worse than she did now.

`El?'

Beverly.

`Elliot, I know you're in there,' the other girl called from outside the fort. Eleven buried herself further into her blanket. There was a sigh. `I'm giving you five seconds to come out.'

Five seconds passed. And Beverly came through the entrance of the fort.

'I'm sorry,' mumbled Eleven, lifting her tearstained face out of the blanket.

'I know you are. *They* don't. So you are going to go back and face them all, tell Eddie you're sorry for almost killing his mom, and fill us all in on how the hell you can knock over an oak tree.'

Four months ago, in her drawn timeline of events, Eleven had deliberately left out the part about her powers, making it seem like the demogorgon had just *happened* to find a way back to the Upside Down. Lucas had handled the revelation about her powers beyond badly. Who knew how the new kids would react? So Eleven had broken her own rule, and lied about it.

Beverly stared hard at her, eyebrows raised.

'I'm coming,' Eleven said, wiping away her tears, the nosebleed and shedding her blanket.

'You know, you can't just run if you don't want to face up to what you did,' Beverly told her in the stern, fair voice of a good teacher, as they made their way back to the road. 'You're brave. It should be easy for you to own up to your mistakes.'

Eleven nodded, taking it in. She tried the word on for size- *brave*. Yeah. She liked that a lot.

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'The *hell!*' Yelled Eddie the minute Eleven came into view. She flinched, but stood her ground. *You're brave. Face up to your mistakes.* 'You dropped an *oak tree* on my mom!'

'Don't worry, Eddie. The oak tree would've bounced,' sniggered Richie. Bill didn't bother to Beep him and simply cracked him on the ear.

'I'm sorry about your mom,' Eleven said, forcing herself to look him in the eye. 'And I won't lie anymore. Promise.'

Eddie crossed his arms, and looked sideways at her. Beverly glared at him.

`Okay, El. Apology accepted. Now cut the crap. What's going on?'

Eleven took a breath. `I'm not called Elliot. My name's really Eleven.' She pulled up the cloth she kept wrapped around her wrist at all times, showing them the 011 inked into her skin. Somehow she couldn't find the words to describe properly what she could do, so instead showed them. Eleven focused on the oak tree and tried to lift it back to it's original position, but found she couldn't. Not without through-the-roof levels of emotion or terror. With her stubborn determination Eleven carried on trying. But when her nose began bleeding and still nothing was happening, Eleven opted instead to lift a trash can to save face. The metal container floated effortlessly into the air, a couple of tubs of Kentucky Fried Chicken bobbing alongside it. Eleven lowered it back down, and pulled up her cloth bandage again.

`Sh-shit,' stammered Bill.

`Not *that* impressive,' muttered Stan sullenly. `It's just a trash can.'

`I killed the bad men. And the demogorgon,' Eleven replied, holding Stan's gaze. She couldn't understand his hatred of her, but guessed it was something to do with the trauma surrounding their experience of Pennywise the Dancing Clown.

`Wait- so you could kill *us*?' Asked Stan, snapping to attention, looking fearful. Eleven shook her head so hard she saw stars.

`I'll never use my powers on any of you. I promise.'

13. Chapter Thirteen: Return

13

19th December, 1985

`Ladies and gentlemen, telekinetic freaks,' announced Richie, barging into Bill's room and followed by a very grumpy Eddie, 'I have hit the jackpot.'

`And how have you done that?' Asked Ben, looking up from his book.

Richie grabbed Eddie's bag off of him and dumped the contents onto the bed.

`Woah,' grinned Beverly, picking up one of the cans. 'The Loser's Club gets off a good one.'

Richie looked furious at Beverly stealing his catchphrase, but waved it away.

`Eleven, have you ever had an experience with alcohol?' Asked Richie in a newsreader voice. 'Pretty sure I know the answer.'

`No. What's- what's alco-hol?'

All the Losers looked extremely pleased.

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Next thing Eleven knew, she was being pulled by the wrists by Beverly and Mike H. They were heading to her fort in the forest.

Bill started to set up a fire. He built a triangular structure with sticks, stuffed tinder in the base of it, and finally trickled a dribble of beer onto it, before striking a match. Flames immediately started to travel up the sticks and the tinder shrank, smoking.

Eleven was entranced by the flickering fire. It was the first time she'd seen one. 'Pretty,' she murmured, reaching out to touch it. Bill hastily caught her hand.

Behind her, Richie was popping open cans and handing them out.

`Come on, Eds m'boy, aren't you gonna try some?'

`Alcohol heightens the chances of mouth cancer by as much as sixty percent.'

Richie took a loud slurp, and smacked his lips.

`You're letting me get mouth cancer,' he said in a sing-song voice. `What could you do to stop me?' He held the can under Eddie's nose, who rolled his eyes, grabbed it and took a drink.

`Happy?'

Richie planted sloppy kiss on Eddie's cheek. `Now I am!'

Eleven snorted with laughter at the look on Eddie's face, which was a mix of disgust and a smile. Beverly flopped down on the ground next to Eleven, and threw an arm around her shoulders. She'd already had a couple of beers.

`Aww,' she slurred. `Best friend El, two girls in a club of sweaty, awkward boys.' Beverly put a can into Eleven's hands, and Eleven, not sure what to do, simply downed it in one. She immediately began to feel a lot less inhibited.

`Sweaty, awkward boys who love each other!' She sang, pointing at Richie and Eddie. Both went shuffley and scarlet. `They do!' For some reason, Eleven couldn't stop giggling. `Another?'

`Another beer? Sure.' Mike H went over to the bag and tossed one over. Eleven grabbed it with her powers and realized it was a lot harder to control under the influence of beer. The can rolled up and down in the air, and she dropped it a few times. Eventually she just crawled forwards and got it manually, pulled the ring and drank it faster than would be advisable.

The Loser Club steadily worked their way through the bag. At around midnight, the cans were all empty and the teenagers were dancing around the fire, holding hands.

`Loser Club, Loser Club, Loser Club, Loser Club,' they chanted loudly. Eleven tipped back her head and laughed, feeling her head spin.

This was the best feeling ever.

0

`Uh... oww.' Eleven sat up slowly, one hand gripping her curls. Drums pounded between her ears. `Ow,' she groaned again, massaging her head and screwing up her eyes.

`Totally worth it,' Richie mumbled, covering his eyes from the sunlight as Eddie and Mike H threw up in the bushes.

`Disagree,' chimed in Stan, groping for his yarmulke and putting it back on. `In fact, I think I'd rather fight Pennywise again.'

Beverly was nowhere to be seen.

`Beverly?' Called Eleven, worry sparking up in her chest. She found it impossible to get rid of the nagging fear that her new family would disappear, or she would be separated from them. Like with Mike and Dustin and even Lucas, to an extent. Even though he hated her.

`Here.'

Beverly was inside Eleven's fort, dribbling a little water into her hands and then wiping her face. She replaced the bottle.

`Hey, Eleven,' Beverly said cheerfully. `I can't actually remember much of last night. Did I say anything- embarrassing?' She seemed fascinated by the row of books and souvenirs Eleven had collected.

`No. Nothing embarrassing.'

Beverly let out a breath. `Good, good. I'd better go. Grandma will be wondering where I've gone.'

She hugged Eleven then ran out of the fort. The wilderness of the barrens temporarily hid her from sight, and then she reappeared on the road.

Mike was the best person in the world, and Eleven loved him more than anything, *including* Eggos. However, despite herself, she couldn't help but wonder occasionally what it would be like to kiss a girl. Beverly, for instance.

But then Mike's face popped into her head. Eleven shook her head, groaned as it pounded harder than ever, and went inside her fort to lie down. The rest of the Losers went off in various states of hungover-ness.

0

When she next opened her eyes, it was dark.

Her headache was almost gone, and the racing nausea. Good. Eleven had been sick multiple times when she caught the flu from Mike H and it wasn't something she wanted to go through again.

She got up, grabbed an Eggo (Eggos were the answer to everything) and sat outside in her blanket. Eleven worked out that she'd slept through the nineteenth of december and all the way through to the morning of the twentieth. The air was freezing, and the euphoria from the beer was gone.

Eleven started to cry miserably. She wished that she could have been selfish enough to leave Lucas and Will in the Upside Down. That way, she could have had enough power to get home. To be with *Mike*-

`El?'

She froze, a sob cutting off in her throat. That voice sounded like- no, it was just Richie. He'd forgotten his glasses or something.

But hadn't Eleven begged him not to call her El?

A slight hope rose in her chest as the figure came closer.

`Mike?'

The Eggo dropped from her fingers. Eleven jumped up and ran towards Mike, crying again for a whole new reason. `Mike,' she mumbled under her breath, like she'd rescinded back to her old

vocably.

Mike stepped to the side. Eleven stopped, a frown on her face.

'How could you.' Mike's voice was cold and condemning. His face was in shadow, inexplicably. The moon should have been illuminating it.

'How could I- what? Mike, you're scaring me.'

'You know what you did. Losing your temper with your *powers*.' Mike spat the word, and suddenly his face was lit up by the winter moon, and it was awful, Jesus Christ oh Jesus Christ what had she done to him? Her eyes focused on his shirt. The collar was soaked in red, with droplets spattering as far down as his midriff. Blood. So much blood, so much he should have been *dead*.

Not even Hermione had bled that much, even with that terrible wound.

'Mike, I didn't mean to, please, I'm sorry-'

'You *liar*.'

'Friends don't-'

And then Mike launched towards her, arms outstretched in a mockery of a hug. His hands connected round her throat, thumbs pressing into the hard part at the centre. Eleven choked, tears on her cheeks and her eyes, horrified, what if she'd done something in her sleep whilst at the same time trying to get him off of her, kicking and thrashing-

And then two thoughts connected.

Mike wouldn't do this to her.

This wasn't Mike.

It wasn't Mike.

Eleven hit it as hard as she could with her powers. It felt hard, but she managed it. The false Mike stumbled back, and fell into the

bushes behind her fort.

It sat up again. Only in a different form. Worse than Mike's poor, ravaged face, with bits and pieces missing and gouges down to the bone.

Much worse.

Eleven lost it; she screamed, couldn't stop screaming, and fled, tripping over and hitting trees.

A root wound about her foot. Eleven's feet went out from under her, and she fell with a painful *thump* in the dry dirt, stones slashing open Beverly's jeans.

It was coming closer, not even bothering to run.

A trickle of saliva ran off it's thick lip.

And it's jaws unhinged, three rows of jagged teeth unveiling themselves. The root tightened until Eleven felt her foot go dead. She shrieked for help, despite knowing no one could hear her, and focused her powers on it.

It coughed, and Eleven screamed as droplets of the black stuff landed on her face. Pain rose from her skin, and Eleven frantically wiped it off.

Her hold broke on the thing, and it carried on moving towards her. It's face seemed to be only it's enormous, unhinged jaws. Teeth poked through the black webby stuff coating one cheek.

And then it vanished.

The root unfurled itself from her leg and settled back into the ground. Eleven sat there on the ground, her heart banging so hard she was sure she would die.

And Eleven ran all the way to the Hanlon farm. When she reached it, she made a beeline for the barn and shattered the lock with her power.

Mrs Huxtable, Mr Huxtable, Bear and Spot all looked up dopily when she ran in.

`Sorry,' she murmured at them, and laid down on Spot, who happened to be nearest. That was where she stayed for the remainder of the night, eyes fixed on the barn door. The image of Mike's ruined face and all that blood on his too-white shirt was burned into her eyelids.

Sometime around five a.m, when the birds started singing, Eleven finally felt safe enough to sleep.

0

Something sharp poked at her side.

Eleven jolted upright, thinking of the horrible monster of last night.

Instead, it was Mr Hanlon. Holding a pitchfork and looking more than a little annoyed.

`I'm not expecting you for a good hour.' His white eyebrows met in the middle, he was frowning so hard. `And yet you're here, broken into my barn.'

With a guilty start, Eleven remembered smashing the lock.

`I'm sorry, Mr Hanlon. Something was chasing me.'

`And what was this something, might I ask?'

Here, Eleven fell silent. What could she say? *I saw the person who I love with most of his face either missing or hanging off. Or maybe, A clown who I think is called Pennywise tried to kill me.*

Mr Hanlon's gaze seemed to go straight through her. Eleven squirmed as she stood before him, still brushing hay off her clothes and out of her hair.

`Whatever this something is,' he said finally, `it certainly gave you a shock.'

Deciding it would be best to agree with him, Eleven nodded quickly. It wasn't exactly untrue, either. Mr Hanlon nodded slowly. `Then you'll probably be wanting breakfast.'

And he led her inside.

Hi! I just want to thank everyone who's followed me and liked my story. For me, five favourites and four follows is very good. There's only seven chapters left! And It/Tom Riddle is most definitely back. Tell me what you think will happen in a review, it'll be interesting to see what you lot predict. And please spread the word of this fanfic if you like it!

14. Chapter Fourteen: Hitchhikers

14

19th December, 1985

Mike couldn't feel his nose.

Or any of his extremities, for that matter. A biting wind cut through the lot of them, despite the heavy winter coats that they'd stolen from a charity bin somewhere around Montreal.

`Mike, I'm cold,' Holly said, tugging on Mike's hand. Her fingers were frozen in his.

`I know. Me too,' Mike answered, automatically picking her up and breathing on her hands to try and warm them up. `We should be there in four days.'

`Canada,' chattered Lucas. `We *had* to cut through Canada in December.'

`Quit whining,' grumbled Max, elbowing him gently. Lucas calmly flipped her off.

`Lucas!' Snapped Mike, looking pointedly at Holly. `She's already started to swear because of you lot.'

`Jesus, weirdo, you're not her dad,' Max said whilst rolling her eyes.

`Yeah? Well, that's what it *feels* like most of the time.'

They were trekking through the forest. The leaves sheltered them from the snow, which was a blessing. The charity bin had only contained a single pair of wellington boots, and they were too big for Holly and too small for the teenagers. Mike was getting increasingly worried he'd drop Holly- his hands were *really* numb- so he put her down. She immediately tried her luck with getting Will to pick her up.

The six kids all looked worse for wear. Every one of them were filthy,

considerably skinnier than when they'd started and were beginning to smell. It was getting pretty unbearable to sleep in such close quarters.

Four more days, Mike thought to himself, letting the thought surround him. *Four more days until I find EL*.

He briefly forgot about the cold and the griping hunger pains, imagining their first meeting, when there was a sudden blast of hail that lasted for five minutes. The moment of forgetfulness was gone as quickly as it started.

0

20th December, 1985

Beverly walked into her grandma's house.

`Gran! I'm home.'

Mrs Marsh sidled out from the living room, her jowls quivering. A remote control was clutched in one hand, three rings on her fingers.

`And where have you been young lady?' The words were breathed and without pause. The rings clicked against the remote.

`With friends.' Beverly tried to walk past to get to her room. Mrs Marsh hissed another word at her back when she was halfway up the stairs.

`Murderer.'

`What did you call me?' Beverly whipped round.

`You heard me of course you heard me.' Her voice sounded oddly warped. `My son is dead because of you.'

Fury and shame burst in Beverly's chest. She stalked down the stairs. `Your *son* tried to rape me. And you know it.'

Mrs Marsh's hand shot out and grabbed Beverly's hair, twisting the short strands around her rings. Beverly gasped with pain; hissed words and silent, condemning looks, that was as far as the old

woman went. Not *this*.

`No one will believe you,' she taunted, her eyes glowing orange and black, tar-like substance starting to melt off one cheek. `And you'll be *locked up* and it will all happen again, Bevvie girl, just you wait!

Mrs Marsh yanked her head back again, and Beverly screamed again; her jugular was fully exposed.

`BITEY BITEY!' The old woman screamed in a voice not her own, chewing at the soft skin on Beverly's neck with the tips of sharp, jagged teeth that protruded impossibly far out of her mouth.

Not her. *It*.

Eleven had been right.

Beverly wrenched herself around, knowing that It intended to kill her, spill her blood all over the cream shag carpet of Mrs Marsh's hallway. The hallway with a candelabra, just in reach.

Beverly's hand shot out and grabbed the candelabra. There was a horrible crack as she brought it down on the old woman's head.

0

20th December, 1985

Max jumped off of the lorry first. Mike passed down Holly then jumped off himself.

`Where are we now?' Asked Dustin sleepily, yawning in the streetlights. Will peered at a sign.

`Uh... Victoriaville.'

`High-five, cut a day off!' Crowed Dustin, groggily smacking palms with Will and then Lucas. `Thanks!' He shouted after the lorry driver, waving.

The driver spat out of the window onto the pavement and sped off, tires squealing.

`Git,' Max muttered darkly.

`Least he gave us a lift,' Dustin replied fairly, shrugging. Then he turned onto the most avoided subject. `So, guys. We have three days until we get there. And one day there until Christmas Eve.'

Everyone else refused to acknowledge his gaze.

`So?' Asked Mike, determinedly staring at his sneakers as he did them up again. There were several nasty blisters on his feet. One might even have been infected.

`So, remember what Holly said after that car hit her?' Dustin persisted. He began to count on his fingers. `Eleven. We know who that is. Richie. Mike, let's just assume she meant Wheeler. And PennyRiddle.' He paused, and looked about the four other teens, who were all pretending to be absorbed by the most mundane tasks. `*Guys, avoiding the topic won't help.*'

`Fine, Dustin,' snapped Lucas, turning round with his arms crossed. `What do you want us to do? Huh?'

`Theorise.'

`Okay. Can anyone remember the name Riddle, or the name Penny? No? Well, then.' Lucas refused to speak. But then Mike had to ruin it all with an idea.

`Holly, can you remember what- PennyRiddle looked like?'

Holly's face drained of colour in seconds. She hesitantly nodded.

`Could you please draw us a picture of it?'

She shook her head violently, wrapping her hands together behind her back. Mike knelt down in front of her. `Please?' Holly chewed on her lip with her small, far apart teeth. An internal struggle seemed to be taking place in her head. And then she nodded. Affection swelled in Mike's stomach for Holly, his annoying little sister who'd better not get caught in the crossfire of whatever was coming on Christmas Eve.

Dustin looked around for anything Holly could draw with and came

up with a little stone. He passed it to Holly. She crouched on the pavement and started to scribble, long white lines scratching into the concrete.

There was about five minutes of intense concentration, with Holly's tongue sticking out and her forehead wrinkled. Then she leaned back.

`Finished,' she said, dropping the stone. The others crowded round to look at what PennyRiddle looked like.

`Shit,' Dustin mumbled.

`That is what we have to fight?' Max asked incredulously.

`Yeah,' half whispered Mike, staring at it's face. One side looked almost... *melted*, and it's body was horribly twisted and warped. `We need to speed up. We'll arrive on the twenty third. That's cutting it too fine.'

`Agreed,' nodded Will. `That thing is gonna be in Derry, isn't it.'

`Yeah,' answered Holly through her thumb. `We need to go quicker.' It was the longest sentence to come out of Holly's mouth since the end of November. So they decided to listen. After a short debate they threw caution to the wind and started walking along the highway. Mike walked at the head of them, his thumb stuck out. All of them were on red alert for any car that even *resembled* a police patrol.

Another hour passed without anyone stopping. Mike rubbed his eyes and checked his watch. Nine thirty p.m.

`When was the last time we ate?' Groaned Dustin to the group at large, kicking a small stone ahead of him. Another car zoomed by without stopping.

`Er... three p.m,' replied Will in the same run-down tone. `Yesterday.'

`If someone doesn't stop soon and have food, I'm eating Holly.' Then Dustin frowned to himself. `Hey. Can you guys hear that?'

`Hear what?'

`Shh!' Dustin held up a finger. Over the noise of cars was a song playing. It got louder and louder. `Isn't that... Highway to Hell?'

A yellow van sped down the motorway, windows rolled down, weaving in and out of traffic and accompanied by a symphony of angry honking. It skidded to a halt in front of them, and a girl with an afro jumped out.

`You guys wanna ride?' She asked.

Smoke wafted out of the interior. Mike hesitated. Then thought of reaching Eleven, and Derry, a day too late.

`Yeah. Please,' he said.

`Mike!' Hissed Lucas. `This might not be safe.'

`Yeah,' added Will, his face worried. `I mean, they could be axe murderers.'

The girl raised her eyebrows. `We can hear you. And I promise we've never killed anyone. Who didn't deserve it, anyway.'

`Lucas. Will,' muttered Mike out of the corner of his mouth. `We need to get to Derry.'

A range of emotions conflicted over the two boys' faces. Then Will climbed in. `I trust you.'

Lucas paused, then sighed. He clapped Mike on the arm.

`I guess I trust you too.'

They all crammed into the van, where it was even harder to breathe on the inside. Mike started having second thoughts, but then the driver pulled away, dodging minivans and beetle cars.

`Hey, uh, could you stop smoking? And roll down a window?'

`Sure,' said another girl with a headband. She lazily opened a window and tossed her cigarette out. The smoke started to thin.

`Thanks. So what're your names?'

`Mick,' said the girl who let them in, pointing at herself. `Dottie.' She pointed to the chain smoker. `Axel. Call him Grease if you're pissed.' A mohican-wearing boy flipped her off. Finally Mick pointed to an enormous man. `And Funshine.'

`Hey,' he said, raising a hand.

`Didn't you forget someone?' Asked the driver, flicking off Highway to Hell. She slowed down, before looking twisting round briefly to look at the hitch-hiking fourteen year olds. `Hi. I'm Kali. We're headed to Derry. What about you?'

15. Chapter Fifteen: Finally

15

Hi! Just saying shoutout and thank you to Menzgus, The Tombed Spirit, Agenian, Alice of Scarlet Flames, k1ttycast1300 and ihaveseverejdop. I think you'll like this chapter...

20th December, 1985

People on the street stared. Beverly ignored them, panting heavily, her loafers smacking the tarmac as she ran. A pain throbbed in the centre of her chest.

She had to warn the others. It was coming. And twenty seven years too early.

Richie's house was closest. She pounded on the door, and Richie's mother opened it.

`Beverly, what-' Maggie Tozier never got an answer. Beverly stormed up the stairs and into Richie's room, who was getting changed.

`*Jesus Christ, Beverly!*' He yelled, yanking his duvet over him.

`Shut up, you have boxers on,' Beverly snapped impatiently. `Richie, it's back.'

His face went slack and pale. `Shit,' he breathed, fear clouding his eyes behind his thick glasses. Beverly nodded grimly.

`Shit, indeed.'

0

Mike Hanlon threw grain out into the coop as Eleven milked the cows. He wondered how long she'd been in the barn, hiding from it.

Well, even if a psychotic being from another dimension was looking for revenge, the chickens needed to be fed. Mike emptied the bag, then walked into the shed to put it back. Mike hummed to himself,

feeling hair spike on the back of his neck. *Nothing's there.*

The rafters creaked ominously.

Just the old wood. Don't turn round, don't turn round...

Mike turned, and looked up. Two red rimmed, glowing eyes stared back at him. And the bird opened up it's beak and screeched.

Mike yelled out, knocked over a bag of grain and slammed his hands on the wooden door, frantically trying to escape the bird that was now scratching his face with razor claws. It's wings smashed into the walls, thumping and shrieking.

There were footsteps running from outside.

`*Help me!*' Screamed Mike. There was a second's pause. Then

BANG!

The doors burst open.

`Go, go, go!' Yelled Eleven, yanking him out and starting to run. She swore fluently under her breath, words picked up from the Trashmouth.

`We need to hide.' Mike looked for any hiding spot as the monstrous black bird fought to get out of the shed. `Here!'

Him and Eleven crouched behind the dormant combine harvester.

0

Eleven shivered next to Mike H, hidden from the bird. She didn't know what it actually looked like. The most she'd seen of it was a glimpse of it's horrible eye, peering out at her from the shed door. A thick, soupy blackness she supposed was it's feathers surged behind it.

`Use your powers,' Mike H mouthed at her. Eleven bit her lip and shook her head miserably.

`Not on my own. I'm not powerful enough.'

Mike H started to shake, his face going grey. He leant back against the scarlet exterior of the harvester, and, like it was a magic charm, Eleven started to sing her ABC's in her head.

The bird managed to get out of the shed. It soared into the air, cawing and shrieking like a nightmarish blend of crow and eagle.

And the call was suddenly cut off.

Eleven panted quietly, hoping it couldn't hear her. No sound. She slowly began to move.

Mike H shook his head at her, but Eleven ignored him, creeping round the machine.

`It's gone,' she breathed out in relief. Heart pounding, she leant against the scarlet, unevenly painted combine harvester and laughed hysterically.

0

20th December, 1985

Mike sat upright.

`Derry? Really? Why?' He immediately felt like the world's biggest geek, especially in this van of chain-smoking punk cliches. None of them reacted badly, apart from Axel. He gave a small snort of derision. However, it was Funshine who answered.

`Kali tracks down people who are like her.'

`Careful, Funshine!' Snapped Kali from the front. Funshine shrugged.

`One girl we've been tracking for a while has just resurfaced. Kali considers her a sister.' He raised an eyebrow as Kali blasted Highway to Hell again. Lucas and Dustin woke up with a yelp.

`What does this girl look like?' Mike asked, hoping he sounded merely curious. *You've got to be kidding me*, he thought.

`Funshine, that is *enough!*' Shouted the purple-haired driver, smacking the steering wheel with one gloved hand. Mike decided to take a risk. He pulled out the newspaper clipping, which was worn completely through in some places due to Mike constantly taking it out of his pocket.

`Did she look like this?' He tapped on El's crumpled face.

Kali swerved into a hard shoulder and slammed the breaks. Everyone jolted forwards.

`Funshine.'

`Yeah?'

`Take the wheel.'

0

Mike H and Richie sat alone in the Tozier household, Richie's parents gone out for the day. Eleven and Beverly, who now had plasters stuck to the side of her neck, were walking down the street, going to fetch the others. They'd already gone to Ben's house, only to be told Ben and Eddie were both at the Denbrough's. A chill wind whipped through Derry, bringing a slight wave of sleet with it. Eleven pulled her hood up.

`You will stay, right?'

Eleven looked at Beverly. She awkwardly played with her sleeves, tugging them down over her knuckles.

`No,' Eleven said gently. `I can't. Need to find Mike.'

`But aren't you happy here?'

`Yes. Really happy. But I miss Mike, and the rest of the party.'

Beverly glanced away. `I'll miss you. You're the only girl, aside from me. The boys can just be a bit, you know, at times a bit-'

`Mouthbreather,' finished Eleven, smiling. A smile stretched across

Beverly's face, despite herself.

`Yeah. A bit mouthbreather.'

They'd almost reached Bill's house. Beverly whacked Eleven's elbow.

`Ow!' Eleven looked round in hurt confusion, and saw Beverly pointing up.

Attached to the house's antennae was a red balloon.

0

`So you're looking for her too?'

`Yeah,' answered Mike. `We found her in the forest two years ago. A little over two years, actually. But then she- she went away.' He looked down at his lap.

`What number?'

`Eleven.'

A sad smile played around Kali's mouth. `I remember her. We played together in the rainbow room.'

`You said you were looking for people *like you*,' said Max. `What's your power?'

Kali smiled. Suddenly Max gasped. Her eyes went wide with wonder and she lifted up two fingers, then brought them close to her eyes.

`Max. What the hell?' Lucas was looking more than a little worried at the behaviour of his love interest.

`Can't you see it?' She breathed.

`No. He can't,' answered Kali. `It's an illusion.'

Max went scarlet and sat on her hands. Dustin, Will and Mike grinned at each other.

`Can't you see it?' They mimicked in the same breathy voice that Max

had used, before collapsing with laughter.

`Leave off,' Lucas said impatiently, as Max used a few stronger words.

`Anyway, the point is, I'm looking to gather all the people like me I can, to try and bring down the lab. So far, I have located two that escaped.'

`Only two?'

Holly went over to Kali, and climbed onto her lap. Kali continued talking with a serious expression on her face as Holly curiously tugged her purple hair.

`They have to hide well. And the two I thought I traced turned out to be dead. That lab is beyond traumatising. Not all people can escape the memories, even if they escape the lab itself. What do you plan to do with Eleven?'

It was then Mike realised they could potentially become enemies in a minute or less. Unfortunately, never one to button her lip, Holly piped up.

`Defeat PennyRiddle. And Mike wants to keep her okay.'

`So they can suck face!' Chimed in Dustin, before yelping as Mike's elbow connected with his ribs. Dottie chuckled and blew a bubble gum balloon at them.

`What do you propose we do about that, then?' Kali asked, an eyebrow raised. `Seeing as I also want to give Eleven a home.'

`Let her choose,' Mike said calmly. `Simple as that. Holly, stop it.'

Holly left Kali alone, and instead played with her feet, as Kali nodded thoughtfully.

0

Beverly and Eleven pushed open the front door. Ominously, it was hanging off it's hinges.

`Bill? Ben? Eddie?' Eleven called. Beverly put a finger to her lips, shaking her head warningly. *We've got to be quiet*, she mouthed.

The house was too silent. All sound seemed to be sapped out of it. The two girls crept up to Bill's room. Beverly pushed open the door.

`Beverly?'

Ben's head stuck out of the wardrobe. `Bevvie, you *have* to run, Pennywise-'

`Is back,' finished Beverly. `It's come after me, Eleven and Mike.'

`We don't know where it went,' wheezed Eddie, who pushed his head out from behind Ben's. `It became a leper then Georgie and then turned into a headless leper in a yellow raincoat. I think it got confused about who to scare.'

There was a bang from downstairs. They all jumped a mile into the air.

`Bill, we can escape out of your window, right?' Eddie said, his voice frantic. Bill climbed out of the wardrobe, shaking his head.

`N-no. Mom and Dad m-m-might cuh-come back. We need to g-g-get it out. Who's w-with me?'

In answer, Beverly reached for Bill's baseball bat. Ben clenched his fists determinedly. Smiling, Bill picked up his penknife. And Eddie looked at them all in horror.

`You can't be serious. No no no. This is not going to go well.'

`Then stay,' Eleven answered calmly. Eddie's left eye twitched sporadically, his mouth twisted, and he took an extra two puffs on his inhaler.

`Screw it. I'm in.'

Bill's alarm clock read nine in the morning. It was unbelievable to think that so much could have fallen apart in such a short time frame.

The four teenagers crept through the house. Eddie had armed himself with a chunky trophy, and tapped it against his thigh.

`Do you think it left of it's own accord?' Whispered Ben. Eddie shook his head.

Then they all jumped a mile into the air.

`*Fur Elise,*' said Bill, his voice cracking. The piano was in the living room. `Let's take it by surprise.'

So they did.

Eleven got herself ready for anything as they clattered through the house, down the stairs and then burst into the living room, holding aloft their weapons of war-

Nothing was there.

`The piano...'

No sound. Actually, everything seemed too muted. Like they were underwater.

`It's still h-here,' Bill said. `It can p-p-play with your senses.'

The lid of the piano shattered, a gout of wood exploding into the air.

Splinters of wood rained down, and Pennywise jumped up onto the ruined remainder of the lid.

It grinned. Eddie dropped his inhaler.

`Here I *CO-OME!*'

The clown leapt off of the lid. It's spine and bones were twisted and poking through the skin. White. Red. Black webbing covering the lot. Eleven felt nausea shoot up to her throat; so, so much worse in daylight.

She tried to focus all her energy on throwing it away but it was too powerful, weight tied it to the ground. *Her psychic energy alone wasn't*

enough.

And she'd been still for a second too long.

It reached her, knocked her over and pinned her down, hands at her throat. Her hockey stick flew across the room and thunked into the wall, useless. Eleven punched him repeatedly and thrashed wildly as it's black saliva dribbled around her head like chocolate sauce on an ice cream. Ben and Bill launched themselves at it and started hitting it with their weapons.

But Eddie thought faster.

He grabbed a splinter of broken piano lid and stabbed it through the one solid eye the clown had. It froze for a second, mouth gaping as blood spurted around the splinter of wood. And it's mouth turning into a O rimmed with teeth. At it's scream, Eleven felt as if her stomach had fallen away with shock.

She wrenched herself free and broke one of the legs off of the coffee table, catching it in the air. She wiped away the nosebleed with a finger, then lifted it up, ready to hammer the splinter in like a nail. The clown held up a hand to stop her.

'Girlie, girlie,' it coaxed, as if the wooden splinter blinding it was no longer worth attention. 'Wouldn't you like to come with ol' *PennyRiddle*? Come on,' it urged, grasping the splinter and beginning to tug. 'I have the power to give you whatever you want. If you let me go.' The chunk of wood came free from it's eyeball with a sickening sound. Dark red blood was sprayed up the length of it. 'Whadda ya say?'

It transformed itself into Mike. No sickening wounds, Mike as she remembered him. Smiling at her, eyes full of love.

Eleven smashed him across the head with the coffee table leg. Mike fell to the floor, blood leaking from his skull, and flickered between monsters- leper, headless nine year old, armless six year old, a middle aged man, and finally it splashed into a puddle of the black, soupy oil that dripped off the side of the clown's face.

It slithered down the skirting board, dissapearing from sight in seconds.

All of them dropped their weapons and ran away.

When they reached Stan's house, Eleven realised she was bleeding quite a lot. The clown, or PennyRiddle or whatever it was calling itself, had managed to scratch her down the face. In the adrenaline rush it had gone completely unnoticed.

`Will Stan have- have-' Damn, what was the word?

`Band Aids?' Suggested Ben helpfully. `Yeah, he will.' For the meantime, Eleven took off her jacket and pressed the sleeve to her face.

`I'll take the blood out. Promise.' Beverly gave Eleven a friendly nudge.

`Don't worry about it.'

And then Eleven turned to Eddie. She hugged him tightly. `Thank you, Eddie. You saved me.'

`Oh, uh, you're welcome.' Eddie looked very flattered as Bill rolled his eyes and knocked on Stan's door. It creaked open on the chain. Stan's eye appeared in the crack.

`You can't come in.'

`Why not?' Demanded Beverly. `Listen up. Eleven warned us in August about Pennywise coming back, and it just happened. It's come back, it's even worse, and we *need to stop it*.'

`I said, you can't come in!' Stan tried to slam the door, and found he couldn't. And then he found that the chain had come undone and the door was flying open.

Eleven wiped the blood off of her top lip, hearing gasps of breath from around her.

She snapped her head up, expecting to see the clown again.

Instead, she gasped herself.

Stan had a square of bloodstained gauze taped to his face, and his arm was in a sling. She leaned forwards and gently touched the gauze. A little red smeared on her fingers.

`What happened?'

`The- the flute lady. I know Pennywise is back, it came for me last night and I'm sorry I didn't say but I can't do it, I *can't*. If you make me, I swear to God I'll kill myself. Don't put me through this crap again.'

Bill's face twisted, his hands twitched and he stormed away down the drive. One after the other, they followed him, Eleven last. She looked at him.

`You promised them,' she said quietly. Then turned away, back to the Tozier's house. Even if she was going to die, she was not breaking *her* promise.

0

Richie's parents phoned to tell him his Aunt Denise had died.

`We'll be there for the arrangements. You go to the neighbours if there's a problem. See you tomorrow.'

The answerphone beeped.

Eddie grinned, seeing his chance. `Hey, Richie-'

`Beep me one more time, *any* of you, and you'll prefer facing off with Pennywise to me.'

Eleven sat in front of Maggie Tozier's make up mirror, clumsily applying Band Aids to the four gouges across her forehead. She'd grown used to minor scratches and cuts from living in the Barrens for four months, hence had never really learned how to use Band Aids. Five of them were stuck across one scratch, with a considerable amount of her hair trapped underneath the top ones.

Jesus Christ. She went back downstairs to ask for assistance.

None of them really wanted to be alone, so the Losers and Eleven piled up blankets, pillows and mattresses, scattered them in the living room, and set up a guard at the door. Bill knew from unfortunate experience that Pennywise had full access to their houses.

Eleven felt jumpier and jumpier as the night wore on, for no reason she could explain.

`Will you stop that?' Snapped Eddie at her the fifth time she peeked out of the curtains. `If that clown's coming tonight, and let's face it it probably will, *when* that clown comes you don't want to give away where we are!'

Too many words to process. Eleven ignored him and paced the floor constantly, to the point where even Beverly and Mike H were beginning to get annoyed.

She felt such fluttering anticipation in her stomach, Eleven couldn't even bring herself to eat an Eggo.

0

December 21st, 1985

Funshine was much more controlled with the brake.

The van came to a steady halt in Derry Highstreet, illuminated by flickering lampposts in need of an electrician.

`We're here,' Mike said softly. `Guys, wake up!' He shook everyone's shoulders. `Get up! We've made it.'

`What time is it?' Dustin groaned, rubbing his eyes. Kali answered.

`Two thirty a.m. Traffic. Funshine isn't willing to weave through cars.'

`Hey. I drive to arrive, not to end up in the emergency room.'

Holly was completely out of it, but sleepily walked through the street, clinging to Mike's hand.

0

Eleven looked out of the window yet again. The Losers had given up complaining to her and were asleep. She'd offered to take guard the entire night, somehow knowing she wasn't going to sleep.

Ben gave a loud snore, before rolling over. She made a shushing mime at him, wholly aware it was useless but doing it anyway. The lampposts flickered.

0

`Do you want to see your friend alone?' Asked Kali. Mike nodded.

`Yeah. Thanks. We'll get you tomorrow, if you want.'

`That's fine. We'll wait here.'

Axel leaned out of the van. `We aren't gonna sleep in here *again*, are we?'

Kali shot him a vicious look, and he got back in.

`Tell her Eight is here.'

And the doors to the van slid shut.

0

Something was moving in the dark.

Eleven pressed her eyes to the glass, narrowing them to see better in the dark.

It was coming from the highstreet. Eleven shook everyone awake.

`Highstreet! Something coming!' She gabbled, forgetting all her learned vocabulary. Her finger stabbed the cold glass, leaving little dots in the mist. Bill roughly pushed her aside and looked out himself.

`C-c-can't see what form it is,' he stuttered.

0

`Is someone looking at us?' Asked Max, rubbing her hands together. White steam puffed from her lips as they walked over the icy tarmac. Lucas peered into the dark.

`Where?'

`I think I saw curtains move. On that house.' Max pointed to a fairly fancy one on the street, the only one without christmas lights turned on.

`Yeah... you're right. Maybe we'd better go somewhere else. This town can't be that big. And we have three days to look for-'

`Eleven,' Mike whispered softly.

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`Stop it! *Stop!*'

The others were in battle position, holding knives and bats, ready to charge out into the streets and tackle the thing. Eleven, without really thinking what she was doing, froze them all in their tracks. `Don't,' she said, her voice breaking. No, it couldn't be him. No chance. None whatsoever.

But still she kept her friends trapped in her telekinetic field, leaving them shouting after her as she opened the door and walked out into the street.

0

Mike's eyes were wide, wet glimmering at the edges of them.

Silence fell over the group as Mike passed Holly over to Will. And started to walk towards the figure on the street, then run, and then flat out sprint.

The figure at the end of the street began to run too.

And Eleven and Mike collided messily in the middle. Both were in tears, smiling and crying at the same time. Eleven held Mike's hands in hers, and lifted herself up onto her tiptoes, and pressed her mouth to his.

She kissed him, their cheekbones colliding.

Something warm and solid filled Eleven's chest, something that was almost painful because finally finally *finally*, he was there, Mike was there.

And he kissed her back.

16. Chapter Sixteen: Sister

16

21st December, 1985

The Loser Club felt Eleven's hold break.

Beverly immediately went for the door, but it opened before she took three steps. They all got their weapons ready again, but it was only Eleven. Tear tracks were all over her face, along with a massive smile.

`Eleven, *what* is going on? How *could* you use your powers... on...'

Beverly's voice trailed off as Eleven led a boy in, holding his hand like she wasn't ever going to let it go. A boy that was more or less an exact copy of Richie. `Is that-'

`Yeah. This is Mike.'

0

Eleven knew she probably should have let go of Mike, but she wasn't quite ready to. And she could tell he wasn't willing either.

`Two years,' he had whispered into her hair. Two years. And she thought her own four months had been hard.

The Losers in the hallway were looking beyond shocked. Then Bill came forward, knife stowed in his pocket.

`Hi. I'm B-B-Bill Denbrough.' He shook Mike's hand cheerfully, as did the rest of the Losers. Apart from Eddie, who still hadn't lowered his own carving knife.

Richie was the last one. Eleven began grinning all over again at the look on Mike's face. However, Richie's expression was sceptical. Eyebrow raised, he looked Mike up and down, clicking his tongue disapprovingly.

`You're a pretty ugly geezer, then,' he said in his Cockney voice.

There was a silence. Then Richie burst out laughing, hi-fived Mike and looked out of the door.

`Hey! You lot, out there! You can come in.'

0

Will looked at the house. `Hey, look- Mike's saying we can come in.'

`Is he wearing glasses?'

`What is up with that Hawaiian shirt?'

`Guys, it doesn't matter! Come on!' Will led the way down the street, by that point half dragging Holly along. She was scraping the toes of her shoes across the ground, ruining them. `I swear you don't act this difficult with Mike,' he muttered at her grumpily.

They stood in the doorway, orange light spilling out of it, and saw that Mike did indeed have glasses, a hawaiian shirt and no Eleven.

`We thought you two would still be sucking face,' commented Dustin.

`Friends,' Mike said grandly, `I thought you should be the first to know- me and Eleven shall be newlyweds by next dawn.'

`What?'

`I am also happy to say that Eleven and I are starting a family-'

`Mouthbreather,' Eleven growled at him, coming forward with...

Another Mike.

`Wow,' Dustin said, impressed. `You missed him so much you made a clone.'

0

Once the Mike/Richie mess was sorted, everyone started to introduce themselves. Holly was snuggled up on a pillow for the first time in

eleven days.

`What's your name?' Asked Max, shaking Beverly's hand.

`Beverly. Cool hair, by the way.'

`Thanks.'

Those two are gonna be friends, thought Mike decisively. Richie came forward. It was still a little hard not to get immediately confused, like jet-lag.

`You lot need anything to eat?' He asked cheerily, extending his hand towards the sparkling kitchen. `We've got loads.'

There was a stunned silence, broken only by the sounds of rumbling bellies.

Then footsteps were charging into the kitchen, along with words like *If I find any pudding I will consider it proof God exists, Do you have any sausages?* and *Tinned tuna, I swear to God this is the best day of my life.*

Eleven tilted her head up to look at Mike, who still stood next to her. His stomach was growling as loud as any of the others.

`You're not hungry?' She asked curiously.

`I'd rather talk to you.'

There was a crash from the kitchen. `Found the pudding,' Dustin called in a very small, sheepish voice.

`I'll make you Eggos. All of them have Eggos in case I come over.'

`That'd be nice.' Mike smiled from ear to ear as Eleven sat him down at the table and heated up two Eggos, floated them out of the toaster, put squirty cream on them and topped it off with some maple syrup.

`Here.' She handed Mike the plate, a knife and a fork.

`Thanks. How long have you been here?'

`Four months. Mike, why are you all so hungry?'

The sounds of chewing and rapturous exclamations filled the kitchen. Will ate ravenously out of a tin.

`We travelled here on foot from Hawkins.' Mike scooped a little cream off with his fork. `Walked for eleven days and hitch hiked the last way.' He wasn't prepared to share Eleven with Kali just yet. `This Eggo is amazing.'

Pride shone from Eleven's eyes. It was rapidly eclipsed by a sad expression. `You shouldn't ever be hungry, Mike.'

Five minutes later, the AV club was sitting in the living room with the Losers, exchanging information whilst being stuffed to the gills.

`A clown tuh-ried to kill us last sum-m-mer,' explained Bill, with the sage expression of a weary veteran. He was seated on Mr Tozier's chair. `Only it wasn't exactly a c-c-clown. It just liked being one. And i-i-it calls itself Puh- Pennywise.'

`PennyRiddle,' Mike said quietly.

`Yeah, that's what it said. How do you know that?' The last sentence was spoken warily; Bill half expected Mike to explode into a horrifying clown.

`Holly got hit by a car. It should have killed her, but didn't. None of us know why. But I think it was so something could give her a-prophecy.'

`Like a prophet.'

`Yeah, like she was a prophet. She said we needed Eleven, me and Richie all together on Christmas Eve. And she said PennyRiddle.'

`The clown can turn into this... stuff,' Eleven said, lifting her head off her knees slightly. `I saw in Hogwarts. Pennywise and... Tom Riddle.'

They all looked to the four-year-old.

`Not finished,' Holly murmured.

`What?' Asked Beverly, who seemed to have taken quite a shine to

the toddler.

`Funny tortoise not finished. I woke up.' Holly turned over again and her breathing became more even and longer.

`Okay, just getting this straight,' called Ben, who'd been taking notes. `The turtle has visited all of us. The turtle is really called the Maturin. He's like Pennywise's nemesis,' he explained for the benefit of the Hawkins kids. `Anyway, so the Maturin has visited us and tried to bring us together. So that means we aren't strong enough alone.'

`Yes,' Eleven said quietly, chin sinking back down. `I'm not strong enough alone.'

`Your powers aren't enough to defeat it?' Asked Mike incredulously, fear shooting through him. If PennyRiddle was worse than a *demogorgon*...

`It's not powers, it's energy. I need a person like me, from the lab.'

Lucas and Dustin whacked each other simultaneously. `Are you mad at each other?' Eleven asked nervously, eyeballing Lucas in particular.

`No,' he explained, grinning widely. `But there's a surprise for you outside.'

0

Lucas pointed Eleven to the yellow van.

`Thank you,' she said, still a little apprehensive.

`Eleven, I just want to say, I'm sorry for how I treated you. You're a good person. And thank you for getting me and Will out of the Upside Down.'

He stopped talking, bobbed his head at her then walked back inside. Blinking a little with surprise, Eleven started to walk to the yellow van.

An orange stub kept on lighting up and going out. Fire. *Remember,*

don't touch it, she thought to herself. Eleven got closer, and saw a girl with a headband leaning against the van. As Eleven got closer, she dropped the cigarette and stamped it out.

`Who are you?' She asked suspiciously. `Listen, kid, just turn round and go away.'

Eleven stared at her intensely. The contents of the girl's pockets lifted up into the air and hovered there. The girl didn't break eye contact as she slammed her fist on the side of the van. There were yells of shock and swear words from inside that not even the Trashmouth used on a regular basis.

`What?' Snarled a girl with an indian accent and purple hair, sticking her head out of the window. `Who's there-' And then she caught sight of Eleven. Kali gave a slight intake of breath, and climbed out of the van to speak to her properly.

When they were both alone, Kali started to speak, her tone tender and careful. `I remember you.'

`I don't remember you.' Although the words were rude, Eleven said them calmly and logically.

`It's okay. You were very young. About the same age as that little girl. Eleven, were you happy with those kids?'

`I was. Very happy.'

`And do you want to stay with them?' Kali asked. Her expression and voice were gentle; she genuinely cared about Eleven's choice.

`Of course I want to stay with them.'

`But with me, you could be among people just like you. There was a mass breakout from the lab, shortly after I left. Nine subjects escaped. You were left behind. Experimented on, tortured. With me, you could get revenge.'

`Papa's still alive. But he won't be able to find me. Mike can keep me hidden-'

`Right under their noses in Hawkins? Eleven, do you really believe that?'

Eleven stuck her chin out and tilted her head up. `Mike can do anything.'

0

The yellow van sped away. Dottie was driving, mounting curbs and skidding round corners.

`They'll be fine. I'll get them when the coast is clear.' Kali was expressionless as she turned away, headed for Richie's house. Eleven wondered how she kept her emotions locked inside; if Eleven got emotional, everyone ran for cover; admittedly, with good reason. Kali rapped businesslike on the door.

`Step back,' Eleven warned her, seeing Mike H peek out of the curtains.

`Why- AH!' There was an unpleasant crack. Kali clamped her hands over her nose as Mike H desperately said `Sorry, sorry, sorry,' over and over again, hands up in surrender.

Kali looked up, an awful lot of blood leaking from her nostrils. `Accidents happen,' she forced out, despite pain and annoyance being written all over her face. `I don't think it's broken.'

Mike H sheepishly stepped out of the doorway. Kali and Eleven walked into the living room, where everyone waited.

`Damn,' Richie said, impressed. `We've got My Pet Monster on the team.'

Eddie threw his inhaler at him, and Richie immediately went on the defensive, hands up. `What? It's just 'cause of the purple hair...'

After sending a deadly glare at Richie, Kali stood at the front of the room, and clapped her hands for silence, nose still bloody.

`Eleven says you need me to defeat this thing. If I'm to help you all need to tell me what you know. Now.'

So they did. Ben acted as secretary, scribbling down everything, including the fears.

Kali nodded as they spoke. `Okay. This thing has killed over a hundred kids in the last year?'

`Yes. Starting with my little brother.'

`And it's coming for all of you?'

`Yeah.'

`Fine. Let's take the son of a bitch down.'

And the kids and Kali planned how best to kill PennyRiddle once and for all.

17. Chapter Seventeen: Blinded

17

Shoutout to CDisis. Thank you for following me!

22nd December, 1985

We need to spy on them, Tom Riddle insisted. They were back underneath the ground, in the sewers. *They've got some sort of upper hand now, I can feel it.*

The clown shrugged. *Go ahead.*

Tom felt Pennywise release his hold on their shared body and he let Pennywise lose his shape. They splashed onto the ground, and they slid through the pipes. It took a few guesses before they figured out where the kids must be.

Process of elimination. They've got to be at the Tozier boy's house.

MAN, I loved Trashmouth. Didn't have to change outta my favourite form 'round him, could just scare him as ol' Pennywise. Pennywise touched a few of the bones poking out. The left pelvis and a considerable amount of spine carved straight through the skin, twisted and disgusting.

Tozier's fear will taste so good... Tom flinched.

Unfortunately, for horcruxes to work, there was a certain... task, that a wizard had to perform. Pennywise caught the thought and grinned.

Oooh, Tommy's a BAD BOY, he crowed. *Tastes like chicken, right?*

Shut up. He shot up the pipe, Pennywise talking to him all the while.

What can you see?

Wait...

Tom bubbled out of the tap in the bathroom, and scanned the room.

He slid out of the basin; voices came from ahead.

`Eew, stop dipping that...'

`Come on, frankfurter in pudding? I'm a visionary. *Vi-sion-ary.*'

They're... playing? Happy? It would be a cinch to defeat these kids if that was what they were doing.

No, we can't just defeat them... gotta BREAK 'em, Tommyboy, did it with Stan, can do it with this lot. What do we have here? Hmm, new one. Pennywise focused their eyes on an older girl.

She's not from Derry? Asked Tom, surprised.

No, that girl is not. The girl with purple hair sipped water leisurely. *New blood. Fresh. Excellent.*

Once you have your revenge, you get me back to Hogwarts?

Wasn't that the deal?

Tom didn't entirely trust this thing, but still retreated back down the pipe.

Pennywise thought it would be good to attack on Christmas Eve. That would certainly break them, to ruin Christmas.

0

Eleven looked down at Holly.

She seemed so innocent. Too skinny, maybe, but the little girl had retained a toddler-like roundness. Mike's sister. Eleven smoothed back some hair from Holly's face. It was greasy and sticky.

Suddenly, the surge of emotions she'd felt over the day caught up to Eleven. Yawning widely, she lay down on a pile of blankets and fell asleep almost immediately. She was woken up several hours later by the answerphone machine.

Beep, Beep- *Richie, this is your mother. We have to stay for a bit. Complications, you see, cuz honey, we're dead too. Yes. Something came*

for us in the night. Tore our heads off and spilled our guts. It tickled us 'till we were screaming...

Richie stared at the answer machine in horror.

Beep Beep, Richie, Beep Beep cuz here comes PennyRiddle! Come and FLOAT!

Static, filling the room, getting louder and louder. Eleven, overwhelmed, clamped her hands to her ears until it suddenly stopped with a deafening click.

`Don't listen to it,' Bill said immediately. `Pennywise lies to s-scare us, you nuh-know that.'

`But what if it was true? It could have got my mom and dad, it could have got them...' Richie sounded on the verge of tears.

`What's coming out of the phone?' Mike H asked suddenly, bolting upright and pointing at it.

Thick, viscous substance oozed out of the holes.

`Break the phone. Break it *now*, Eleven!' Kali yelled. Eleven focused all her power not on PennyRiddle but on destroying the Tozier's phone. A shower of sparks exploded from it and it fell off the wall, wires dangling. For good measure, Eleven tore through those as well. The plastic phone hit the wooden floor, casing breaking apart on impact.

The black stuff was gone.

`It didn't want to attack us again,' panted Mike. `Just scare us. Like you said.'

It was only only two days until Christmas Eve. And due to lack of forethought and ravenous hunger, Max, Will, Mike, Dustin, Holly and Lucas had devoured most of the food in the Tozier kitchen. The rest had gone to Kali, Eleven and the Losers.

The upshot was, the only food left in the house was a few candy bars Richie had been coerced into giving up.

`What time is it?' Beverly asked. Max checked her watch.

`Nearly seven in the morning.'

`So the supermarket's gonna be open. Who wants to go?'

Understandably, there was silence. Their sense of safety was completely compromised just by being *inside* the house... wandering freely out into the open? That was begging Pennywise to kill them. They were certainly soaked in their own fear by then, he'd smell them a mile off.

`I'll go,' offered up Eleven timidly.

`Absolutely not!' Mike barked, at the same time as Dustin pointed out Eleven and Kali were their greatest chance.

`No one take this the wrong way,' Dustin said, edging round the words, `but we need someone less important.'

`I can go,' Max said simply. `The turtle didn't say anything about me.'

`Uh, *no*.' The words came out sharply. Lucas seemed a little abashed and backtracked. `If anything happened to you, I don't know what I'd do. Stay here, me and Dustin can go.'

`Lucas. I'm not gonna stay here. You think I can't handle myself?'

`Well, yeah, of course you can, but... Fine. If you're going, I'll come too.'

0

Lucas and Max left the door looking apprehensive.

They came back in shaking like leaves, carrying bags with tear holes all through them, half an hour late.

`What happened?' Demanded Eleven, her voice high with fear.

`What do you think?' Max spat, before putting down her bag and flopping onto a mattress. `It came for us. Had to run through the

Barrens to get away.'

`M-My sister and my mom, it- it came for them,' stammered Lucas. `I saw them, Erica was- she was *blinded* and mom-'

He stopped talking and started gagging.

`I saw my stepdad and Billy,' Max said hoarsely. `They kept saying I was gonna pay...'

`It's okay, it wasn't real,' Beverly said comfortingly, patting her shoulder. Max shuddered.

`It felt real.'

18. Chapter Eighteen: PennyRiddle

18

24th December, 1985

No one slept on the night of the twenty-third, no matter how much it was needed. Eleven had entertained herself by making random objects float in the air, much to Holly's delight. Eventually it became a game between the two of them.

Max lay on her stomach, reading one of Richie's books, and Beverly and all the boys apart from Eddie and Mike H had been thrilled to find a Dungeons and Dragons set buried in Richie's wardrobe. Beverly excitedly described her character, a five headed gorgon with bad breath.

`Beverly, you're mean to *make up* the characters.'

Richie was flipped off for the second time in an hour. The first time, he'd tried to convince Kali that Eddie liked to be called Eds.

That was over twelve hours ago.

0

On the evening of the 24th, the kids and Kali were armed to the teeth, waiting for the inevitable attack. The front door opened, and Mike came running in. Eleven felt relief settle on her stomach as he brushed thick flakes of snow out of his hair.

`Kali, are you sure Holly's gonna be safe?' He asked. She nodded reassuringly.

`Axel acts like a tough guy but put him within a foot of a baby he gets this stupid gooey look. Your sister will be fine. Go upstairs and change.' Tingles ran up Mike's spine as he hurriedly changed into a horrible Hawaiian shirt of Richie's, and stuck on a spare pair of glasses with the lenses knocked out. Richie had already changed into the grubby clothes Mike had been wearing since the beginning of December, and, with some resistance, had donned contact lenses.

Mike and Eleven stood next to each other. Queasiness roiled in Eleven's stomach.

`Mike, promise me you'll stay safe.'

`Course I'll stay-'

`*Promise.*'

`I promise.'

Mike reached out a hand and wound his fingers around Eleven's. His palm was clammy.

`And your fear, by the way,' Mike said suddenly, gripping her hand tighter, `don't worry about it. I trust you. You wouldn't ever hurt me.'

There was a loud noise.

Everyone jumped and looked at the walls, where the noise was coming from. Mike started to listen harder, straining his ears. *No... it wasn't.*

It was.

Something was banging on the pipes in the walls to the tune of My Country Tis of Thee.

And then a warped voice rang out...

`Oh Derry, tis of thee, Sweet place to fee-eeed me, Of thee I sing- Land where the chil-dren fried, Land where you'll sure-ly die, From ev'ry mouth, and eye, Your blood, will *flow!*'

It ended on a high note. The banging carried on, no longer in any rhythm, simply a pounding death beat.

`Keep your eyes *fixed on the wall,*' shouted Beverly, her hands shaking as she gripped her knife.

The clanging got louder and louder, now originating from one spot. Eleven shook with terror. Mike stared at the wall in front of him, not even daring to shut his eyes. If he just kept PennyRiddle in sight then

the plan might not be as risky...

`Boo,' the clown whispered from behind him.

Mike screamed.

He ran to the door, throwing away the barricade and sprinting out into the night, pretending to panic. Voices pursued him- `Richie, NO!'- but so did the clown.

`Come on Trashmouth come to me let me suck the skin off of you!'

Mike started to feel real fear, and ran faster, a pain in the centre of his chest.

`Tastes like chicken!' PennyRiddle screamed after him. Mike counted the alleys, then took a sharp left and sprinted down the one that would lead him to the Barrens.

0

The rest clambered out of the window. Eleven's stomach tossed as she heard the things PennyRiddle screamed after Mike. If everything went to plan they could cut the monster off at the Barrens.

0

Mike skidded to a halt in the snow. He'd reached Eleven's fort, and, sure enough, there was the clump of foliage behind it.

He wriggled into it and stopped breathing.

The clown entered the clearing. It's orange eyes stared straight at him, black goo dripping out of the corners, like tears. Of course, it couldn't actually see him... right?

`I can smell you, Trashmouth.' PennyRiddle walked closer to him, closer and closer, back and legs twisted and bones sticking out every which way. `You'll smell better if I cook you.' And it opened it's mouth, rows of jagged teeth extending out of it's lips and the black liquid dripping down it's face.

The black liquid that was Tom Riddle, who had somehow fused with

the Derry monster.

Now Mike's heart started to pound like crazy. No sign of the others. They weren't being fast enough...

And then blood gouted out of PennyRiddle's shoulder, where a steak knife stuck out.

It turned and screamed at the ten figures sprinting into the clearing, saliva flying. Mike broke into a laugh of relief, and came out of his hiding place, brandishing the bread knife.

Wait... *ten* people?

What had happened to Eddie and Ben?

0

`*Aaah!* Oh my God, Jesus *shit*- It'll get infected, I know it!'

Eleven winced at the bone sticking out of Eddie's ankle. He'd misjudged a leap over someone's fence.

Then the clown's scream rippled out over Derry.

`Ben stays,' she snapped. `Look after Eddie.' Feeling heartless, she continued the run to the Barrens, with Richie in disguise as Mike, blinking constantly due to the contact lenses.

He needed to come if the plan was to work. After thirty seconds or so the others caught up, minus Eddie and Ben.

Fear zapped through her chest, desperate to reach Mike in time. Kali sprinted ahead with her long, strong legs.

They reached her fort just in time, from the looks of it. Max hurled her knife at Pennywise to get it's attention off Mike, and it lodged into the clown's shoulder.

`Nice shot,' gasped Lucas, before firing rocks at it. The Wrist Rocket pinged back and forth.

It bounded towards them, and mid-leap twisted into an enormous bird and flew directly at Mike H.

`I am not afraid!' He screamed, slashing at the bird's feathers. They floated to the grass. Where they landed, smoke rose and an acrid burnt stink pervaded the air. The bird took a final dive at Mike H, tore away a flap of skin, and then dropped to the ground; when it rose, Henry Bowers grinned at them, holding a dog by the scruff of it's neck. Mockingly, he read out the inscription on the collar.

`Mr Chip. Return to Hanlon Farm.' He put his head to the side in a pout. `Awww. So sweet. Must be a very loved dog.' Mr Chip wriggled and squirmed, yapping helplessly. Henry calmly broke the dog's neck with a resounding *snap*. It's last bark cut off sharply, and the golden labrador flopped heavily to the ground. Mike H's mouth twisted as blood poured down his face.

`You have no idea how much I've wanted to do this.'

Realising it's mistake, Henry Bowers' smirk dissappeared just before Mike's metal pipe smashed it's jaw. It was back to PennyRiddle, lower jaw sticking out too far from the top one. With a sickening, grinding sound, the clown pushed it back into place, dog corpse gone.

Missiles and attacks came from every direction. Kali looked to Eleven.

`Now?'

Eleven nodded, and they joined hands. But before they could properly attack PennyRiddle bowled Kali over into the thickening snow, now a man in a lab coat, white hair slicked back. Grinning.

`Papa,' both test subjects choked.

Dr Brenner removed a taser from his pocket. `You must be punished, Eight,' he intoned, switching it on. Kali screamed as the taser's barbs punched into the skin on her forehead. Dr Brenner's mouth opened.

Unnoticed, a drop of black goo dropped from his mouth into Kali's. He electrocuted Kali mercilessly, killing her.

Beverly was closest. She stabbed Brenner through the neck so hard the tip of her knife came out the other side, but all that happened was the black goo separated out when the knife went in and slowly solidified to push it back out.

Beverly backed away as the clown bore down on her, speaking in a high, falsetto voice.

`Legal proceedings, Bevvie my girl, you know no judge will take your case.'

Eleven stopped trying to rouse Kali, who was now completely unresponsive and instead ran full pelt to the clown.

`Go *away!*' Screamed Eleven, automatically trying to hit him with her powers. Nothing happened. So instead she picked up Beverly's knife and tossed it to her.

`Beverly! *You have to do it!*'

The other girl gripped the knife so hard her knuckles went white and swiped at PennyRiddle. Will ran forwards and joined in, hitting it around the knees with a bat. They broke, and PennyRiddle fell forward with a howl of agony. It seemed torn between a demogorgon and Beverly's grandmother.

`We're winning!' Yelled Mike victoriously. Richie shook with fear.

`Clowns,' he croaked out, trembling all over.

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Holly was sleeping in the grubby motel, with the gang dozing, cigarettes hanging out of their lips or magazines dropped over their faces.

At first, she'd dreamt of travelling again, long hours of walking and trying to hitch hike with her stomach growling.

And then all that was peeled away and instead, she was back in the dark place, with the funny tortoise floating above her.

`Holly Wheeler, you are going to have to run.'

`What?'

`You'll know the way, I'm putting it into your head now. Go to the Barrens. You're going to want to be there tonight.'

`Why? Why do I need to be there?'

But she was waking up. She didn't want to wake up! *What was happening?*

Holly opened her eyes to gloomy, smoky light. It was as if a map was in her head; she crept out of the room, feet freezing despite her socks.

It would take her a little while to reach the Barrens. Half an hour, to be exact.

Holly Wheeler toddled her way along the snowy streets of Derry, shivering in her winter coat.

19. Chapter Nineteen: Mike

19

Okay, there is only this chapter and one more to go before this fanfiction is finished. I'll be sad to see it go! Anyway, enjoy.

24th December, 1985

PennyRiddle's head revolved on his shoulders to look at the two boys, switched over so he couldn't scare them.

Richie's eyes went wide as he realised what he'd said.

`Clowns, huh?' It said, advancing on them menacingly, knee caps broken.

`N-no, no, that wasn't what I meant-'

`*CLOWNS!*'

Suddenly a thousand copies of PennyRiddle whizzed about the boys. `*Tried to keep it a secret, eh?*' They screamed. `*Can't try and swap identities and keep it from ME!*'

`Richie, you *moron!*' Yelled Mike, frantically turning round and getting dizzy; his fake glasses fell off into the dirt. Which clown was the one that could hurt them?

They juddered to a halt, snapping into a single thing.

Eleven.

But Eleven with her head shaved, in Hogwarts uniform. She dissolved into atoms as she looked back at him, agony and sadness etched into her face. Mike stared at it, transfixed as Eleven flickered to Holly, starved and frozen, his mom, eyes shut with bruises all over her, his dad, vomit on his shirt and around his mouth.

`Mike! *It's not real!*' Eleven shouted, resisting the urge to run to him. Kali was still unconcious, she wasn't moving...

Eleven tried frantically to wake her up so they could destroy the fused monster. No use. No pulse. Kali was dead.

Nothing could defeat It without her and Kali's power combined.

Dustin went with a little brute force. With a yell of rage he tried to hit it over the head but Ted Wheeler grabbed the bat, and twisted it out of Dustin's hands.

The boy was paralysed for a second.

And then Dustin lost several more teeth as Ted Wheeler smashed him across the face. Blood dripped out of Dustin's mouth as he lay unconscious in the dirt. Bill ran to help him and PennyRiddle smashed the bat down onto his head, then kicked him for good measure.

'That's for the bolt gun,' it hissed.

With a flurry of legs, it scurried into the trees, and everyone froze. Mike H was looking weak and pale as he continued to lose blood, Dustin and Bill were unconscious-

And then rocks started to hurtle towards them from the woods.

The teenagers screamed, ducked away, dived behind trees for cover. PennyRiddle picked up another piece, flexed it's arm, released.

One thick chunk soared towards Mike. Eleven threw it back into the forest, away from him.

Will gasped when a rock hit his forehead. He dropped like a stone.

Lucas tightened his grip on his bat and swung wildly, trying to knock away the rocks.

Phys Ed was never his strong point.

Lucas collapsed, a little blood beading on his forehead. Max hurled her knife at PennyRiddle, but it slopped into a puddle and Billy Hargrove was suddenly grinning at her with a mouthful of teeth, teeth getting wider and wider.

Max stared into the deadlights. Beverly, next to her, was entranced too. Their eyes got wider and wider.

`Stop looking at it!' Richie screamed. PennyRiddle snapped it's jaws shut and they dropped to the ground, unconscious.

PennyRiddle turned around to them, grinning, a trail of black saliva down it's chin.

And then it dissapeared.

Immediately Richie, Mike and Eleven drew into a circle, looking into the darkness, eyes straining.

Something came up behind Richie.

A something with purple hair, very much alive.

`Kali,' gasped Richie, fist pressed to chest. `Christ, I thought you were the clown.'

`Where is the clown?' Asked Kali, standing oddly. It was probably the effects of the taser, but to Mike it seemed familiar.

`Don't know,' Richie replied, trembling all over. Total silence.

And PennyRiddle suddenly appeared behind Mike, grabbing him by the shirt and hoisting him into the air.

`I said I'd *break* them!' It screamed, one hand transforming into jagged shards of glass.

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`Eleven?' Mike asked nervously. She was glaring at him with pure panic in her eyes.

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`Let go of him!' Screamed Eleven, balling up her fists, terror shooting into her throat as the clown pushed the blades underneath Mike's chin.

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Apprehension grew in Mike's stomach. He looked at Kali. Blood trickled from her nose; *black* blood. He suddenly had a flashback. Ginny Weasley. Standing exactly the same way, like a marionette.

`Eleven, it isn't real!' He shouted. `Listen to me! It's possessed Kali, it's using her power! It *isn't real!*'

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PennyRiddle drew back the glass knives that had replaced it's fingers. Grinning at her, the clown plunged them towards Mike's chest.

`NO!'

Eleven threw her hand forwards before the clown could do anything, hitting him with all her strength. It dropped Mike. She looked up triumphantly, seeing PennyRiddle fly back through the air, arching gracefully-

But seeing Mike smash into the tree.

Black goo shot out of Kali's nose and mouth and she dropped to the ground again, stone-cold dead. The black goo transformed into the clown. The clown that was shrieking with laughter.

Eleven's senses shut down; all sound, everything apart from Mike went dark. `No-'

Shaking uncontrollably, Eleven stumbled over to Mike, getting louder. `No, no, no, *no*, *NO!* Mike, how do I stop the bleeding...'

Dark red oozed from the base of his skull. Mike's face was screwed up in pain but he tried to smile.

`Quickly! Tell me! Tell me *now!*'

`El... it's... okay.' His hand reached up slowly, and touched Eleven's cheek. `It's okay.'

`I'm sorry, I- I didn't-'

A small figure came out of the bushes, shivering. Holly. She walked through the snow, and sat down next to him, and took his other hand.

`Hey, Holly,' he said, smiling at her weakly.

`I love you, Mike,' she whispered. Mike squeezed her small fingers.

`I- I love you too. Eleven?'

`Yes?'

`Don't feel guilty, okay? Not- your- fault.'

Eleven broke, and tears began sliding down her cheeks. A few dropped onto Mike's face, mingling with his own. He carried on speaking, despite the water trickling from his eyes.

`Promise me you won't punish yourself, or feel- guilty, for the rest of your life.'

`Mike-'

`*Promise me*, El. Please.' His hand tightened on her cheek.

`I promise. I promise!' No response. She paused, a thought suddenly hitting her stomach. `You heard me, didn't you?'

Mike's hand fell into the snow, leaving a smear of blood on her cheek. `You heard me, didn't you? Didn't you? *Mike?*'

And his eyes slid shut.

Holly began to cry.

Eleven's mouth hung open. She gulped, starting to shake uncontrollably. And then screamed, sound ripping out of her throat. Her agony echoed off of the trees, the rocks, everywhere.

The glass in Derry exploded outwards.

Her senses started to come back, peripheral vision and hearing steadily reigniting. The clown was still laughing, doubled over, hands pressed to it's stomach.

`I killed Kali! I killed your boyfriend!' It sang through the giggles. `*You lose. You lose!*'

Eleven lifted up her hands. Unchecked emotion surged through her, striking her again and again.

Let it end.

The clown's face dropped as it realised it may have made a mistake. `*No, that's cheating, you aren't allowed to cheat!*'

Eleven shook her head slowly, face twisted with rage.

The clown was caught in her power like a rabbit in the headlights.

I don't want to be alive anymore.

The clown's face pulled back in agony, writhing and twisting in the air. But no sound came out. Unsurprising, really.

Eleven was crushing it's windpipe.

I don't want to feel if it HURTS THIS MUCH!

And PennyRiddle exploded, bursting apart into atoms, dissapearing into the air.

Eleven collapsed to the ground, tears rolling off her cheeks and creating pock marks in the snow.

She couldn't stand up.

In Derry, clocks with their glass faces shattered began to chime.

One strike, two strikes, three strikes, all the way to twelve.

Christmas Day.

20. Chapter Twenty: Soon

20

Mrs Richie Wheeler, thank you for following me!

25th December, 1985

Still collapsed in the snow. Still unable to feel anything. Damp seeped through into Eleven's skin, biting at her viciously.

She barely felt it.

And even if it was hurting, she deserved it.

Because she'd killed him- she'd- she'd *killed him*-

And Eleven could only think of Mike, like that might bring him back.

Mike is gone.

The thought rang through Eleven's head, sharp and clear as a bell. It hit her- no one would ever know what Mike Wheeler was truly like, not even her. No one could know what thoughts he had when he smelt something or tasted something, or what memories came back when he saw a cat, or-

Eleven let out a fresh sob at the thought, and curled up into the foetal position. Suddenly, pressure on her shoulders.

'It's okay, El. It wasn't your fault.' Will's voice. He pulled her up, so she was sat in the snow. Eleven saw Dustin and Lucas and Max and Holly, all gathered at the base of the tree. 'Try and take a breath.'

'I killed him,' Eleven whispered hoarsely.

'Don't think about that right now. Come on, breathe in and out. With me.'

There was movement behind Will as Dustin knelt down. 'Mom said we should cross people's arms across their chest,' he said solemnly, before carefully doing so.

And then he halted, a weird look on his face.

`Dustin, you okay?' Max asked, looking concerned.

`I- hang on.' Dustin pulled up Mike's eyelid. Eleven wanted to scream at him, scream at him to leave Mike alone.

`Stop it, Dustin. He's gone.' Max's voice was hard but sympathetic. Eleven suddenly realised Max was as sad as the others.

`Shut up! I think- let me check.' He pressed two fingers into Mike's wrist. Checked again, and Dustin let out a gasp, light suddenly sparking in his eyes.

`I can feel his pulse! Will! El! *I can feel his pulse!*'

`What?' Gaspd Lucas, dropping to his own knees and checking. `Oh my God! Oh my God! Max, quick, phone an ambulance!'

`On it,' she barked. Max sprinted away through the Barrens.

Eleven scrambled to her feet, and pushed Dustin out of the way, and lay her head on Mike's chest.

She let out a noise, halfway between a cry and a laugh of joy.

It was there.

She wasn't imagining it.

Mike's heart was beating.

He was alive.

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26th December, 1985

Local Youngsters Overpower Criminal in Clown Mask

A would-be burglar attempted to rob the Tozier house after placing a phone call informing Margaret and Wentworth Tozier a close relative had died. However, upon going to break in, the criminal discovered Richard Tozier and several of his friends on a sleepover. After chasing

him through the Barrens Tozier and his friends found the missing Hawkins children in the woods. An eventful evening, to say the least. The two groups teamed up and managed to chase off the thief.

Sadly, the evening was not without tragedy.

Michael Wheeler is currently in critical condition at Derry hospital, due to suspected head trauma. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

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23rd January, 1986

After a month, the nurses in Derry Hospital were all familiar with the strange, silent girl, who visited Michael Wheeler in Room 353. Of course, they thought her name was Elliot, but that was irrelevant.

Eleven walked quietly through the sterile, gleaming corridors; she hadn't seen a place this clean since Hawkins Lab. The resemblance to the lab made it difficult for Eleven to visit Mike and not feel scared.

Still she climbed the stairs up to Mike's room. Eleven noticed her hand, with it's grubby skin and dirty fingernails, on the polished silver banister. It looked like it didn't belong, just like her. The flight of stairs ended, and Eleven followed the painted yellow line on the floor. A woman in a white uniform wheeled a sleeping patient along the corridor.

`Hi, Elliot!' Nurse Mackintosh greeted her, stopping for a moment.

`Morning,' Eleven replied, smiling politely. It was nine a.m. White, winter light shone through the windows, reflecting on the floor.

`Off to see Mr Wheeler again?' There was a sympathetic note in the nurse's voice. Eleven nodded, holding up the tinfoil wrapped plate.

`Yeah.' His room was only three doors along; Eleven knocked on the door, even though she knew there was no need, and then pushed it open. The beeping and whirring reached her ears. Mike lay on the clean bed, his dark hair spread out behind him on the pillow, freckles still. The plate she brought yesterday was untouched on the locker

next to his bed. Eleven replaced it with the plate she carried- two Eggos, with whipped cream and maple syrup. She took a deep breath, swallowed, and smiled down at him, hoping she sounded cheerful.

`Today was fun,' she told him, settling down in the chair. `Holly did you a drawing.' It was folded carefully in her pocket. Eleven took it out and added it to the collection already pinned on the wall. `And Max gave me *The Colour Purple*. It's harder to read than the stuff Bill gave me, but I still like it.'

Eleven told Mike all about her day, as usual. Passed on any drawings Holly did, who was fast developing a love for art, or any messages from the others. The rest of the Party sometimes visited with her, but not today. And his parents never came. Eleven talked at Mike until her voice was hoarse.

`Can't think of anything else to say,' she said finally. Mike's face didn't move. Eleven bit her lip. `Could you squeeze my hand? Or something?' She moved forward in her chair and held Mike's hand, squeezed it as if to show him how it was done.

No response.

Eleven leaned back. She'd really thought doing that might wake him up.

`I'll come back tomorrow. I promise. Dustin says he'll bring comics for when you're awake.'

Steam had stopped rising off the Eggos. Eleven stood up, feeling, as always, like that might be the last time she saw Mike. With some difficulty, she walked out of the door, not wanting to be caught in there after visiting hours were over.

In the month since that horrible day, Will had offered her a home and Eleven had accepted. Now her legal guardian was Joyce Byers. Will seemed a lot happier. Since Joyce had relaxed a little their relationship had certainly improved itself, and the temporary move to Derry appeared to be repairing her nerves.

Eleven left the hospital, deliberately refusing to look at the Barrens. She made her way to a slightly pricier hotel than where Kali's friends

had stayed, where Holly, the Byers, and her were staying.

The hotel rooms were mainly paid for out of Joyce chasing up Lonny on several years worth of alimony.

Smiling at the memory of that phone call, Eleven took her key out of her pocket, and let herself into the room she shared with Holly and Joyce. Jonathon and Will were in the neighbouring one.

The scent of coffee greeted her, warm and comforting. Clothes, books, drawings and crayons were spilled out around the room, like an explosion of homeliness.

Mike hadn't woken up.
But he would. Soon.

El Byers settled herself down in front of the TV, and began to watch Bruce Forsyth's Hot Streak.

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Midnight.

The hospital was silent, aside from the squeaking of nurse's shoes. Mike Wheeler, with several tubes in his arm, breathed steadily and evenly.

Eleven PennyRiddle NononoMikehowdoIstopthebleeding WILL! EL! Would you like to see your friend aloneTicklesiloveyou TASTESLIKECHICKENthe Demogorgon. It got me

Through the rush of thoughts, Mike picked out one- *Tickles*. He wondered why-

And then realized the thing in his nose tickled.

What was it...

Eleven's there. I told you, remember? Derry iHop Sorry, Holly-

Mike tried to jerk himself out of the rush of thoughts, trying desperately to latch onto something else.

There was something in his nose...

Oxygen. Cannula. That was it.

Holly drew you a picture today-

ELEVEN!

They're- American-

Elliot-

Demogorgon-

BadmenPapaLabRUNgo go go!-

Again, the rush of thoughts threatened to overtake him. Okay. Cannula. What else?

Mike felt his hand clench on something slippery. His fingers felt weak, but he managed to focus on it. Bed sheets. That was it.

Cannula. Bed sheets. Something soft under his head- *pillow*.

Beeping.

And a sweet smell, the smell of Eggos. Who would have brought him Eggos...

Eleven.

With a gasp, Mike Wheeler opened his eyes.

The End